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THE GODDESS

NIRANJAN PAL

ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARU ROY,

THE INDIAN PLAYERS (LONDON)

SENTINEL HOUSE, W.C., LONDON.

1925.

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at the Arunoday Art Press, 48, Grey Street,
——— CALCUTTA.

DEDICATED

TO

GUY BRAGDON

*(Chief Dramatic Director of Selwyn Theatres,
New York, Chicago and Philadelphia)*

TO WHOSE FRIENDLY ENCOURAGEMENT AND
PATIENT GUIDANCE I OWE WHATEVER
SUCCESS I HAVE MADE WITH MY
ATTEMPTS AT PLAY-WRITING.

THE GODDESS

AUTHOR'S REMARKS.

Although it has become a habit with many present-day dramatists to write elaborate preface to their plays, happily I have been spared this torture by my English publishers. I believe it was Bernard Shaw who first introduced this practice. After all, Bernard Shaw is a propagandist first and a dramatist afterwards, and the public prefer to be tickled by his provokingly delightful style and delightfully provoking analysis. G. B. S. has no equals and I have no pretensions to the merits and standing of even his lesser known contemporaries. I am but a worshipper at the gate of the Holy Temple. I would much rather go without these introductory remarks. My friends of the Indian Players, who are responsible for this edition, however, insist that I should write at least a few words—even if they be in the nature of an apologia. But I remain unconvinced.

I believe the function of a dramatist begins and ends with the play itself. His duty is to present an unbiased picture—the different aspects and viewpoints—of the subject he is dealing with,—unencumbered by his own conceit and idea. He might colour it—he might even turn and twist it about, but he should not arrogate to himself the role of a preacher. Indeed, one may liken the dramatist to the mechanic, whose job it is to collect together

in the assembly room of the workshop all the different component parts of a machine and make them into a completed whole. It is the function of the dramatist to assemble his characters—separate them—analyse them—piece them together and present them with disarming sincerity as so many living beings like himself—all seeking after truth—all bent on solving some engrossing problem. In this play, I have attempted nothing more.

The writing of bad and indifferent plays may be a crime; and in our fight for existence and recognition, there comes a time when, as a last resource, we fumble for our hurriedly-written and badly-conceived manuscripts, and thrust them in the face of the producer screaming for popularity. Although I too have had to pass through that purgatory, in this particular instance I am in a very happy position. For, I did not write "The Goddess" with the idea of getting it produced or published. I wrote it for the sake of writing something; hence, it laid hidden in my trunk for four years before seeing the light of day.

And, if anyone is to blame for the production and publication of "The Goddess," it is my esteemed friend Guy Bragdon, the American Dramatist and Stage-Director, who was the first to unearth it from my trunk! Guy Bragdon might be truly called the father of the Indian Players organisation together with Himansu Rai. He gave up a weekly income of four hundred pounds to make the Indian

Players what they are to-day. But for him, perhaps there would not have been any "Goddess" or any "Indian Players."

One word more. New is a misnomer. Although "The Goddess" has been billed as such, I have no hesitation in acknowledging publicly, what I have always done in private, my indebtedness to Rabin-dranath's "Bisarjan" for the inspiration of this play. While my theme and its treatment are totally different, I am proud to confess I could never free myself entirely from the magic spell of Tagore in the writing of this piece.

BHAWANIPUR, CALCUTTA :

The 18th July, 1925.

NIRANJAN PAL.

THE GODDESS

Dramatis Personæ.

(In the Order of Their First Appearance).

KRIPA	... (Peasant Woman.)
NAREN	... (Subordinate Priest.)
BHAKAT	... (Favourite of the High Priest)
CHARAN	... (Professional Priest.)
RAM DAS	... (Priest with an Ideal.)
SHAMBHU	... (Money-lender.)
SEETA	... (Stranger.)
JAICHAND	... (Dacoit.)
ABHIRAM	... (High Priest.)
MAYA	... (Beggar-maid.)
SONIA	... (Temple Dancer.)
PREMA	... (Priest.)

Temple Dancers, Villagers, Priests etc.

CAST

(As Played in London and the Provinces.)

RAM DAS

Himansu Rai.

ABHIRAM

Pares Mookerjee, Tilak Nemo, Sasanko Sinha,
Hubert Carter.

SHAMBHU

Mohan Dutt, Gauri Ojha, Tilak Nemo, Sukumar
Mullick, Frank Cochran, Syd Montagu.

JAICHAND

Tilak Nemo, Sukumar Mullick, Syed Abdul Haque.

NAREN

Syed Abdul Haque, Mono Maitra, Jaya Gopal.

BHAKAT

Gulab Sing, Sukumar Mullick, Mono Maitra,
Tilak Nemo.

CHARAN

Gauri Ojha, S. C. Mookerjee, Sukumar Mullick,
Naren Banerjee, Niranjan Pal (the author).

PREMA

Jyotsna Sen, Sukumar Mullick, Kanai Dey,
Profulla Dutta.

SONIA

Laurka, Lolita Hamilton.

KRIPA

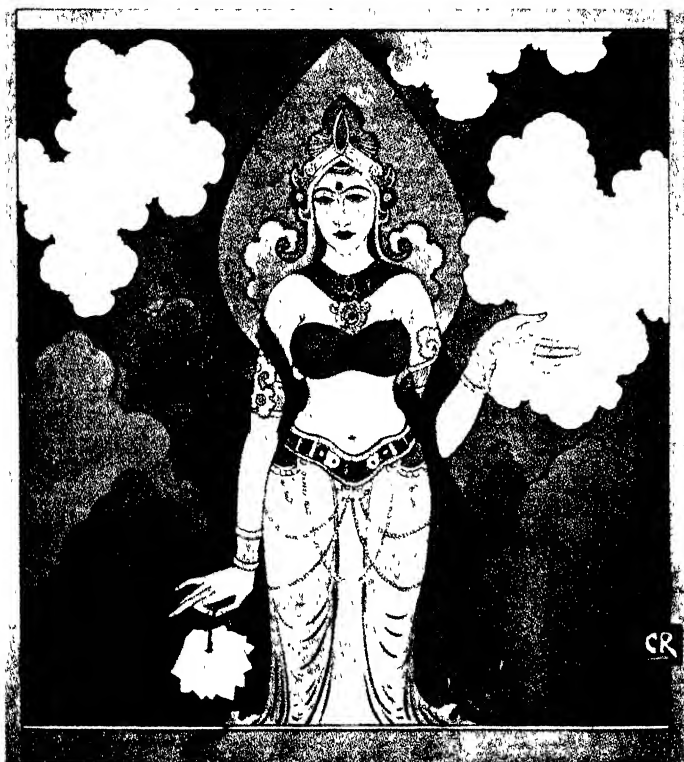
Rani Dutt, Grace Kimberley, Suniti Devi, Mary
Robertson.

SEETA

Elsie Griffin, Menakshi Devi, Kamala Gawthorne,
Baroness Steinhalt Von Lilieh.

MAYA

Rani Waller, Stella Dorrell.



CR

THE GODDESS

ACT ONE

BEFORE THE ALTAR OF THE GODDESS

It is the Moment before Dawn :

AT CURTAIN RISE

(*FROM OFF STAGE : SONG.*)

Vestal Maids are chanting on their way !
Haste to greet the fresh awakening day !
The jungle birds are singing
The temple bells are ringing
And all the world is filled with laughter gay !
The gentle kine raise sleepy eyes to gaze
In wonder at the song of joy and praise !
Awake ! Awake ! To greet the Lord of Dawn !
Hail ! to the Sun-God ! Hail ! for it is Morn !

Ram Das, Naren, Charan, Bhakat, Prema, Robin and Mehtab are discovered on altar platform with their backs to the audience in prayer. At the end of the song the priests get busy arranging the altar. Naren comes down : xs to L.

KRIPA [enters L: sees Naren] Thy blessing,
Father Naren !

NAREN. Peace be with thee, my daughter !

KRIPA. Thinkest thou the Great Goddess will answer our prayer for rain soon ?

NAREN. Canst doubt it ?

KRIPA. Five weeks now the monsoon hath been delayed.

NAREN. Aye. [*Exits*].

KRIPA. Thy blessings too, Father Bhakat !

BHAKAT. Peace be unto thee and thine, my daughter !

KRIPA. Rain must come soon or we perish.

BHAKAT. What matter ? With DEATH there cometh NEW life.

KRIPA. I am content with this.

BHAKAT. Then why worry about a little matter of rain ?

KRIPA. But in all my years never have I seen such a drought.

BHAKAT. If 'twere not drought, it might be flood. If not flood, pestilence. Our misery here is but the outcome of our former bad living.

KRIPA. But the grain coming for our relief ? It hath not come. Some say it hath disappeared mysteriously.

BHAKAT. I have naught to do with that.

KRIPA. Nay—but there will be famine soon.

BHAKAT. I have naught to do with that. [*In rising anger : makes to go*].

KRIPA. The people will starve.

BHAKAT. I have naught to do with that.

"Thy Blessings
Father —"



KRIPA. They will perish.

BHAKAT [*greatly annoyed*] Let them!—And is that thy concern, or mine?

KRIPA. Thy blessings too, Father Charan!

CHARAN. Thou pest, be off!

KRIPA. 'Twas but a short blessing, Father.

CHARAN. Short? Overlong!

KRIPA [*to Ram Das*] Thy blessings too, Father Ram Das.

RAM DAS. Nay—such goodness and piety as thine need no blessing from me.

KRIPA. I have but an anna—thou canst have that.

RAM DAS. Nay—keep thy anna—I want it not.

KRIPA. Thou refuseth to bless me—and when I offer to pay thee. In what have I offended?

RAM DAS. Only in thy proffer of money.

KRIPA. I understand thee not. Art putting an insult upon me?

NAREN. Kripa, thy speech is unjust to him both as a priest and as a man.

KRIPA. 'Tis because of my caste. He refuses to bless me because of my caste.

RAM DAS. Nay, Kripa. Thou knowest well there is no caste distinction within the temple. Sudra thou and Brahmin I, yet equal here—but—Such poor blessing as is in my power to bestow is thine. For, truly thy faith is that which moveth the mountain and leadeth to the Devas. May thy days be many amongst us, may all thou hast

be multiplied, and—may thou rest in the bosom of the Great Mother for all time.

KRIPA. I thank thee—I thank thee, O my Father! Never was such a blessing. I shall speak of this to all. Never was such a blessing.

CHARAN. NEVER. How much did it cost thee?

KRIPA. Nothing—NOTHING. [*Exits hurriedly*].

CHARAN. Nothing? [*Looks after Kripa, then to Ram Das*] Art become a saint that thou art so free with thy blessing?

BHAKAT. Aye—or dost thou seek to curry favour with the people? Thou canst not win to the high priesthood that way, thou—thou upstart.

CHARAN. A fine pair. Old sage— [*points to Naren*] young prophet [*points to Ram Das*].

BHAKAT. Young fool—[*points to Ram Das*] old imbecile [*points to Naren*].

NAREN. Saints are needed when such as ye infest holy temples. [*To Bhakat and Charan*].

RAM DAS. Aye—and prophets too—to prophesy their casting out.

BHAKAT. Reformer! Thou wilt be the one to be cast out. The high priest hath said it. [*Turns to exit, collides with Sambhu*].

Shambhu enters and collides with Bhakat.

BHAKAT. Out of my way—money-lender!

SHAMBHU. Since when has this way been thy way?

BHAKAT. Look where thou art going. [*Exits*].

SHAMBHU. Go where thou art going.

SHAMBHU. Pranama! Pranama! Holy Fathers!
Am I too late?

CHARAN. To be saved? It is never too late.

SHAMBHU. Nay—nay. I am saved already, many times—by the gifts of my forefathers. I meant, am I too late for the service?

RAM DAS. Aye—but be not so downcast. Thou art ever too late.

SHAMBHU. Is that my fault?

CHARAN. The fault is someone's.

SHAMBHU. But it is not mine. Ever I hasten and ever the service is over. First I walk, and now I run—

CHARAN. Thou shouldst gallop.

SHAMBHU. And if I did—never could I overtake thee in the speed of thy prayers.

CHARAN. Give me but a rupee and thy prayers will be heard.

SHAMBHU. Nay—I—I—would not pray alone. It is unlucky.

CHARAN. Thou money-lending leech—what dost thou mean?

SHAMBHU. Dost not remember? "Pray not with the priest lest thy prayer is fashioned for his ears and not for the Gods." Dost not remember?

CHARAN. Nay.

SHAMBHU. It is from the holy Shastras. I fear thou hast not read them lately. In each incarnation one should read them again. One may learn how to gain much profit from the holy Shastras.

CHARAN. It is not from them that thou learnest thy tricks of trade.

SHAMBHU. Umn—they were wise indeed in the days of old.

CHARAN. But none so wise as thou—NOW.

SHAMBHU. O my Father—such tribute from thee—who art noted throughout the countryside for thy wisdom—in matters of prayer money,—such tribute I shall treasure and bequeathe to my grandsons.

CHARAN. MARRY, O money-lender—before thou dost brag of thy grandsons.

SHAMBHU. MARRY! O my Father, ever dost thou think of such unpleasant things.

During the above Ram Das gives some instructions to Naren and takes no notice of Shambhu. Now, as the soft amber light of the early dawn slowly creeps inside the temple, Ram Das and Naren come down the altar steps. Naren exits.

RAM DAS. Dawn breaketh.

SHAMBHU [*blandly*] Aye! Dawn breaketh and still there be no sign of rain!

RAM DAS [*faces Shambhu—smiles sarcastically*] And if there had been, wouldst thou have come to pray for it?

SHAMBHU. Pay prayer-money with rain-signs in the sky? Nay! That were indeed the act of a fool [*anxious denial*].

RAM DAS. So, it is only in thy need that thou prayest.

SHAMBHU. Surely, when there is no need, why pray?

RAM DAS. Why, indeed! That philosophy hath become well-nigh universal, particularly in the countries to the West.

SHAMBHU. And a very good philosophy too. Doth one cry out for help, save in danger or in need? Cry tiger when there is no tiger? And who would rush to aid thee, when the tiger really cometh? Though for that matter only a fool would rush in to save anyone from the tiger.

RAM DAS. So, Shambhu, thou art here again?

SHAMBHU. Aye!

RAM DAS. Hath past another night in prayer?

SHAMBHU. Surely.

RAM DAS. Strange!

SHAMBHU. Strange?

RAM DAS. Until a month ago thy face was more familiar to the market-place than to the holy shrine.

SHAMBHU. Aye. The money-lender to the mart, the priest to his temple, each to his trade.

RAM DAS. And wherefore prayeth the money-lender? For good interest upon his loaned out capital?

SHAMBHU. Nay.

RAM DAS. Or doth he return thanks for the past beneficence of the Goddess?

SHAMBHU. To return thanks for what one hath is wasted breath!

RAM DAS. But—to return thanks in advance for what one hopes to receive?

SHAMBHU. Ah! That indeed is another matter.

RAM DAS. I understand. But surely—even the money-lender hath gratitude in his heart for what he already hath!

SHAMBHU. Aye! Great gratitude!

RAM DAS. Well then! Shouldst thou not voice it humbly—before the Holy Altar? Shouldst thou not?

SHAMBHU. Not. Father,—thou art a holy Brahmin, a priest of the Great Goddess—

RAM DAS. I am a Brahmin.

SHAMBHU. Say then! Brahmins tell us that the Great Goddess is all wise, all knowing—

RAM DAS. Dost doubt it?

SHAMBHU. [*gesturing the question aside continues*] Well then,—since the Great Goddess knoweth all, she knoweth of the great gratitude in my heart. So I do not tell HER what she already knoweth. She might think—I thought her ignorant—might even take offence!

RAM DAS. And—by not offering thanks thou savest the altar dues?

SHAMBHU. I will not risk offending the Great Goddess when—when she loveth me so already!

RAM DAS [*at a loss, curiously*] Thou speakest with strange certitude—of the love of the Great Goddess—for thee?

SHAMBHU. Aye! And well I may! She hath proved her love!



"This matter of
Rain is purely a
Business matter."

RAM DAS. She hath! And how?

SHAMBHU [*glances about to assure himself against being heard by others; then in a whisper*] Despite all other prayers the Great Goddess hath permitted no single drop of rain to fall—not since the seed were planted a month ago!

RAM DAS. And, the failure of the monsoon, the lack of rain proveth the Great Goddess' love for thee?

SHAMBHU. Surely, since for a month, nightly, before her holy altar my prayer hath been for NO rain!

RAM DAS. Thou—hast been praying here nightly for NO rain?

SHAMBHU. Aye, and my prayer hath been answered! Proving her love for me!

RAM DAS. How couldst thou do such a thing! Why, the lives of thy friends depend upon rain!

SHAMBHU. I have no friends, I am a money-lender.

RAM DAS. The lives of thy neighbours then!

SHAMBHU [*moving away, irritated*] Their lives are their concern! Without the continuation of the famine and the failure of the crops I cannot increase my capital!

RAM DAS. Shambhu! [*Assuming mock menace*].

SHAMBHU. Aye, Father? [*Instant reverence*].

RAM DAS. Thou art a knave!

SHAMBHU [*placatingly: but irritated*] I am a—business man! And this matter of rain is but a business matter. Do my neighbours think of me in

their prosperity? Nay! In times of bountiful harvest I well-nigh starve [*sorry for himself*]. In times of plenty, who seeketh the poor money-lender!

RAM DAS. I wonder why such as thou trouble to worship at all!

SHAMBHU [*quickly, defensively*] Oh I did not—until lately! But with the planting of the seed something had to be done.

RAM DAS. So, thou took'st to prayer?

SHAMBHU. Aye! It could do no harm.

RAM DAS. No [*sarcastically*].

SHAMBHU. I could lose nothing.

RAM DAS. No, indeed.

SHAMBHU. No special reason NOT to?

RAM DAS. Indeed, no.

SHAMBHU. And I MIGHT gain by it. Besides all my neighbours were praying—

RAM DAS. But they—prayed for rain!

SHAMBHU. Aye! It was that, that gave me the idea! They thought prayer would bring rain. Pshaw! The opinion of the crowd! All that I have, hath been made by placing my judgment against other people's opinion! People opine they can repay my loans. My judgment is, they cannot! So, I acquire their property and prosper. Beside, if one hath no judgment at all, one seldom loses in wagering against the opinions of the crowd!

RAM DAS. Shambhu! Tell me—dost honestly believe that the Great Goddess hath really listened to thy monstrous prayer?

SHAMBHU [*not to be caught*] Umn—the most that I can HONESTLY say is that I have prayed for no rain and there hath been no rain. You priests may be right after all, Father Ram Das. There may be something in prayer—when it comes sincerely upon the lips, from the depths of the heart—as MY prayers HAVE. Aye, from the uttermost depths of my heart.

RAM DAS. Not more so, than those of thy neighbours.

SHAMBHU. Aye! It is somewhat of a puzzle, is it not? But—if the famine continues I shall begin to believe [*edging up to exit eyeing Ram Das*] almost—I think!

RAM DAS. Shambhu!

SHAMBHU. Father!

RAM DAS. Thou art indeed fallen away from the faith of thy forefathers!

SHAMBHU [*blandly*] The faith of my forefathers! Beautiful! Childlike! A faith for children and forefathers!

RAM DAS. Yet—thy forefathers were greatly beloved by the Great Goddess.

SHAMBHU. My forefathers gave much land and money in the Holy Temple! Enriched even yon Altar!

RAM DAS. And thereby were themselves enriched in sanctity.

SHAMBHU. And thereby left me poor in purse!

RAM DAS. Thinkest thou, only of the material? What of thy spiritual welfare? Hast ever thought of that?

SHAMBHU. Nay! There is no need.

RAM DAS. Art thou an infidel!

SHAMBHU. Nay! Nay! Nay, Father! But my spiritual welfare hath already been well-assured.

RAM DAS. How?

SHAMBHU. For their piety and liberality my forefathers were thrice blessed even unto the ninth generation. I am of the EIGHTH. My grandsons—If I have any—may need to worry about their spiritual welfare—but not I—NOT I!

RAM DAS. The money-lender hath indeed become a philosopher!

SHAMBHU. There again I differ. TO BE a money-lender one FIRST must be a philosopher. [Exits].

Ram Das holds with whimsical hopeless smile—looking after him; Seeta enters down L 1.

SEETA. Pranama! Pranama! Holy Father!

RAM DAS [quick change] Seeta!—Hast come to pray again!

SEETA. Aye! For the monsoon. Why else should I come here?

RAM DAS. Canst thou not find thy God in thy hut, Seeta?

SEETA. In my hut!—Dare I seek Him in such a place—in my poor hovel?

RAM DAS. And, why not?

SEETA. I have never sought God anywhere else but here.

RAM DAS. It is time thou didst. Thou mayst find Him even in a hovel. Seek Him where thou wilt Seeta, but do not come to look for thy God here.

SEETA. Indeed?

RAM DAS. I have not found Him within this temple and it is not likely that thou wouldst.

SEETA. Then thou art very unlike a priest.

RAM DAS. I am unlike some priests even as thou art unlike most strangers to our village.

SEETA. What dost thou mean?

RAM DAS. Be not alarmed, I mean no harm to thee—nor to Maya.

SEETA. Maya?

RAM DAS. The beggar girl thou hast reared and loved as though she were really thy very own child.

SEETA. Thou.....knowest she is not!

RAM DAS. Aye. I have discovered thy secret. BUT be not alarmed. Thou knowest I have come to love Maya; perchance as much as thou, perchance more than THOU.

SEETA. Aye! I know. And I have welcomed thy love for her. Thou art a good MAN as well as a good PRIEST. There ARE some such. Yet, at times—I fear—thee.

RAM DAS. Fear—ME?

SEETA. 'Tis but a feeling! Yet, at times it hath COME to me that out of thy love for Maya naught but unhappiness to her will come.

RAM DAS. I will chance that.

SEETA. Aye, and so will Maya! That is why I ask thee—why hast thou untangled the skein of the past? Why hast sought to discover my secret?

RAM DAS. Because—it was necessary, before I can do that which I have in my mind to do.

SEETA. Thy marriage to her?

RAM DAS. Perchance.

SEETA. I should have told thee, but I have been so afraid. Afraid lest Maya, learning I am NOT her sister, cease to love me. Swear to me! Swear to me, that thou wilt never tell my Maya. Her love is all I have. Without it—

RAM DAS. I swear it.

SEETA. Thou art INDEED a good man. Thou wilt make her happy? [*Pleading fearfully*] Thou must make her happy. If thou hast a doubt thy love will bring aught but happiness to her, then put her out of thy heart, now. Cease to think of her. Kill the love she hath for thee. Wilt swear that, too?

RAM DAS. Aye.

SEETA. Forgive me, Father—I—I—love her so.
[*Brokenly Pranamas and exits*].

Bhakat enters.

RAM DAS. Bhakat—where hast thou been wandering all night?

BHAKAT. Why should that concern thee?

RAM DAS. It doth not. Not if thou hast been on a mission of betrayal.

BHAKAT. Thou hast never a word without a sting—thou upstart!

RAM DAS. NAY?

BHAKAT. Know then—I went on a secret mission of the Holy Father.

RAM DAS. Secret mission!

BHAKAT. I went to gather means to bring the people back to the holy temple and to Father Abhiram.

RAM DAS. So! Thou foolish man! Thou hadst done better to save thy labours. The people will not come back despite thy schemings.

BHAKAT. How dost thou know?

RAM DAS. Because I have been following the same methods for weeks.

BHAKAT. But things are different now. There is a famine.

RAM DAS. Thinkest thou, because of that, the people will forget their past dislike of the Holy Father and return to his fold?

BHAKAT. Surely.

RAM DAS. Can the Holy Father give them rain?

BHAKAT. Of a certainty—yea.

RAM DAS. Dost thou honestly believe he can?

BHAKAT. Aye.

RAM DAS. Well, if it please thee—think as thou

wilt. Foolish MAN! It is pretty to see how easily thou art deceived.

Jaichand enters L: holds.

BHAKAT. Time will prove who is the fool: thou or I. [*Exits L*].

RAM DAS. Or both? [*Whimsically*].

JAICHAND. BOTH!

RAM DAS. Ah, Jaichand?

JAICHAND. I trust him not. He hath disclosed everything to Father Abhiram.

RAM DAS. Indeed! It is as well. [*Slight pause, Face front—the idealist*] I have no more cause to fear Father Abhiram. Now is the hour to unfurl my banner—to make known my plan—to preach my gospel. Though the world may condemn me—though my friends may forsake me, STILL, heedless of all else, I shall go on till I reach the goal. On this my mind is fixed.

JAICHAND. Thou dost always harp on thy gospel. I am a man unpractised in the ways of priests. Tell me, what is it, that thou seekest to establish.

RAM DAS. I seek to destroy this—[*points to the temple*] that—[*pointing the image*] EVERYTHING!

JAICHAND. And then—?

RAM DAS. Build a new system over the ashes of forgotten creeds and dogmas—that is my mission. What we have to find is a brotherhood without a temple, religion without creed, morals without a

priesthood, goodness without a sacrament and fellowship without caste, class or race!

JAICHAND. Thou dost aspire to reach the moon! And I wish thee every good fortune, my friend. But, tell me, why art thou envious of Father Abhiram—he is not a bad man—a weak man he may be. But he means well.

RAM DAS. Means well. He means well? So he lendeth himself to deceit and falsehood; so he sendeth spies among the villagers to lure them back to submission; so he proclaimeth the divine duty of passive obedience—submission to one's lot, contentment with one's station in life, respect for one's betters and for priests—and heaven hereafter for all who are meek, patient, weak and suffering. If a man required a crime to fill the measure of his iniquity, surely he hath been full of crimes.

JAICHAND. But the people like falsehood and deceit, and thou canst not blame the Holy Father for that!

RAM DAS. The late Holy Father of revered memory was beloved of the people. He never found it necessary to practise iniquity upon iniquity to win their love.

JAICHAND. He was truly a holy man—Father Abhiram tries to be holy—

RAM DAS. Sayest thou! That is why the long sought for MIRACLE is about to be performed to prove his greatness by returning to the villagers the stolen grain and livestock. Dost wonder that I seek

to purify all this? Dost wonder I seek to overthrow the man responsible for all this?

JAICHAND. But thou too art going to perform another miracle by proclaiming Maya to be the incarnation of the Great Mother. Thou too art bent on deceit.

RAM DAS. Deceit must be fought with deceit.

JAICHAND. Why is it necessary to proclaim Maya as an incarnation of the Goddess?

RAM DAS. So that the people may learn of my mission through her. She has been a stranger to our village. No one knows who she is, or—whence she came. Yet, with her sweet innocence she hath endeared herself to one and all. The people will be more ready to accept my message through her than through thee or through me.

JAICHAND. But Maya believeth implicitly in Father Abhiram. She worships daily in true devotion before the altar of the Great Goddess.

RAM DAS. I have prepared the way to destroy her faith in both!

JAICHAND. How?

RAM DAS. Thou shalt see soon! [*Clang of door off*]. Father Abhiram comes—I've but a moment. Listen!

Jaichand comes closer.

RAM DAS [*sotto voce*] Have thy men go about among the villagers speaking continually of the rumours of the coming of the Great Goddess herself in the guise of a beggar-maid. Go!

Bang of door off L-2. Jaichand Pranams to Ram Das, turns L to face Abhiram, who enters down L.

JAICHAND. Pranama, Holy Father! Pranama!
[*Profound obeisance*].

ABHIRAM [*assuming beneficent poise of blessing*]
Peace! Peace be with thee, my son.

Ram Das holds cynically, outward respect.

Jaichand keeping eye on Abhiram exits stooping-ly L-1.

ABHIRAM [*not knowing Jaichand is off*] And unto thy children and children's children. Aye, even, unto the ninth gener— [*looks down where Jaichand was kneeling, then sees him off L testily*]; A rude fellow that!

RAM DAS. Aye! Jaichand the dacoit, a robber-leader of the jungle.

ABHIRAM. He seems to have but little respect for holy priests.

RAM DAS. He hath no respect! Yet he must be treated with a certain consideration, his rudeness be ignored.

ABHIRAM. Ah! He hath been useful! [*Blandly*].

RAM DAS. Without him thy commands could not have been obeyed.

ABHIRAM. How?

RAM DAS. 'Twas Jaichand and his men who last week intercepted the grain coming to the villagers' relief and stored it in the Little Temple, as thou didst command.

ABHIRAM [*gloatingly at the thought*] A good stroke that! I was wise indeed to put my trust in thee! Thou art in high favour with the Great Goddess for thy devotion to her interests!

RAM DAS. All my poor success hath been solely because of thy blessings, O my Father!

ABHIRAM. Tut! Tut! Tut! Thou knowest better! [*Pettishly: looks about guardedly*] Come here! Come here! Come here! Last night? The livestock? All went well?

RAM DAS. Aye! O my Father!

ABHIRAM. Ah! [*Menacing transition*] Thou art sure? Naught must be left to those insolent villagers! I hold thee responsible! If thou hast not carried out my commands to the letter, the Great Mother knoweth how to punish as well as to reward.

RAM DAS. Naught hath been spared to them, O My Father! Thy commands HAVE been obeyed to the letter.

ABHIRAM [*relaxing gleefully*] Good! Good! Now I shall be able to give them the miracle they have been waiting for. I shall save them from starvation and death, return them their grain and livestock and establish myself firmly once again in their midst. I really did not desire to harm them—only affright them.

RAM DAS. Thou hast said it.

ABHIRAM [*fearfully*] None of the jungle-dacoits—I mean none of THY agents was detected in his blessed work?

RAM DAS. At dead of night? Nay, O my Father.

ABHIRAM. Then all is well! In their prosperity the people forget the faith of their forefathers, forget their tithes and altar-dues, forget their respect for and fear of their priests—but NOW! We shall not have long to wait ere they crawl whimpering to our feet! When they discover their all hath been taken from them, then will they come! And then shall they be made to realize that what hath happened is the punishment of the Great Mother!

RAM DAS. Even now Jaichand and his men go about among the people spreading the word.

ABHIRAM. Word? What word?

RAM DAS. Why—that last night's work was the divine punishment of the Great Mother.

ABHIRAM. But—were that wise, yet?

RAM DAS. Is it not—the truth? [*Menacingly*].

ABHIRAM. Methinks thou and this Jaichand and his jungle-robbers are more responsible.

RAM DAS. Nay! We cannot be held responsible since we are thy servants and obeyed your commands.

ABHIRAM [*threateningly*] Thou meanest me to suffer if aught concerning last night's holy work be discovered?

RAM DAS. Thou? Nay! How canst thou suffer? If the master is responsible for the acts of his servants, then how much more responsible is the Great

Goddess for the acts of her High Priest when she divinely inspired him to holy destruction.

ABHIRAM. That is so. Thou knowest even I would have dared to give no such commands unless so inspired. All that hath been done hath been done to enhance the glory of the Great Mother. Hers the reward of our success, hers the blame if failure results. Aye! A good thought!! Thou shalt be thrice blessed, aye, even by the Great Mother herself! I, Abhiram the High Priest, swear it.

RAM DAS. Thou art too good, O my Father.

ABHIRAM. Aye! Aye! [*High tension*] The word must be spread that even as the Great Mother hath meted out punishment to sinners and disbelievers, so hath she rewarded her faithful servants! That even as she hath taken vengeance upon those who have failed in their homage to her, to me, to my words of wisdom—[*breaks off, eyes Ram Das*]. Thou hast a thought?

RAM DAS [*breaks from cynical poise to humble poise*] Nay! Nay, O my Father! Who am I to think? I am here but to listen to thy words of wisdom, to carry out thy behests.

ABHIRAM. And make no doubt, thou art thrice blessed in so doing. Yet, methought thou hadst a thought.

RAM DAS. Nay. Or, if so, it arose from thee, O my Father. Thy thought is powerful, it reacheth far!

ABHIRAM. Thou art progressing, my son. And didst really get my secret thought? Good! Then act upon it! [*Menacingly—eyeing Ram Das*] But beware—lest thou be mistaken in the thought thou thinkest thou got from me!

RAM DAS. Mine be the blame if my thought is wrong, O my Father.

ABHIRAM [*sarcastically*] Thou art dutiful as ever, O my son. Er—er—what thinkest thou of my thought? [*Blandly trying to discover it*].

RAM DAS. Can the secret thought of the High Priest of the Great Goddess BE aught but divine?

ABHIRAM. Nay, nay! Rather, I meant—what thinkest thou WAS my thought?

RAM DAS [*dissembling*] An inspiration—from the Great Mother herself?

ABHIRAM. I am curious to know if thou hast divined the inspiration correctly?

RAM DAS. Since it hath been vouchsafed me through the medium of her chosen interpreter, the High Priest, I am certain! Thou, if NOT certain, hast but to voice the inspiration to be certain, I am certain.

ABHIRAM [*angrily : beaten*] Nay! Nay! As thou hast said, thine be the blame if thou art mistaken.

RAM DAS. And thine the reward if I am not.

ABHIRAM. A bargain!

Bhakat enters hurriedly down L : sees duo and xs quickly to Abhiram.

BHAKAT. Pranama, Father—

ABHIRAM. Art come to give me thy report?

BHAKAT. Aye, O my Father. But—[*indicates Ram Das*].

ABHIRAM. Come!

Abhiram xs to L-2, turns to face Ram Das. Bhakat goes up to Abhiram, holds.

ABHIRAM. Ram Das, this last year thou hast been as the staff upon which one leaneth in old age. Methinks none more fit than thou to succeed me in my holy office.

RAM DAS. Nay! Were that not too exalted an ambition, O my Father?

ABHIRAM. Nay! For at times I feel that thou hast all but succeeded me, already! [*Grins at Ram Das menacingly*].

RAM DAS. I understand thee not.

ABHIRAM. Bhakat doth! [*Exits*].

Bhakat exits L-2 with triumphant grin at Ram Das.

RAM DAS [*pause, until clang of door is heard off L-2. Lightly menacingly, eyeing L-2*] Sayest thou? Then mayhap it were wise to succeed thee fully—and now!

Maya enters L-1 with garland of jasmine for altar offering and a bouquet of flowers for Ram Das.

RAM DAS. Maya!

MAYA. Pranama—

RAM DAS. Nay! Nay! [*Quick break to love*] Thou knowest I would speak with thee only as a man!

MAYA. I know. And I think I like thee better—
as a man.

RAM DAS. Then indeed AM I thrice blessed!
[*Delightedly*].

MAYA. Thou art indeed a man! I do love thee!

RAM DAS. And I thee! [*Takes end of garland*]
Jasmine!

MAYA. Gathered at the auspicious moment, at the
first faint blush of dawn.

RAM DAS. For the Great Mother.

MAYA. Aye. But these are for thee [*passes him
bouquet of jasmine*].

RAM DAS. Beautiful! Like thyself, Maya. I shall
treasure them even as my own great love for thee!

MAYA. Why art thou so serious this morning?

RAM DAS [*serious, facing front*] Perchance the
night—hath made me so.

MAYA. Hast been all night at prayer?

RAM DAS. Nay. At deeds.

MAYA. And that which thou hast done hast made
thee serious!

RAM DAS. Aye!

MAYA. I think I like thee serious—as a MAN.

RAM DAS [*meaningly, faces Maya*] When the
beggar-girl hath become a Goddess—I pray that she
may not forget—the MAN.

MAYA. Now—what meanest thou by that?

RAM DAS. My words.

MAYA. Thy words! Ever thou delightest to pro-

voke me by thy mysteries! Thy words! Ever dost thou employ words to conceal thy thoughts!

RAM DAS. And—do I conceal my thought? [*Whimsically*].

MAYA. Thou dost indeed! [*Piqued*].

RAM DAS. Then indeed AM I a wise man! [*Lightly*].

MAYA. Thou art a very provoking man. I never did understand thee!

RAM DAS. But thou knowest my love for thee! [*Lovingly*].

MAYA. I know—thou hast said it.

RAM DAS. Now thou art provoking. [*Almost pleadingly*] Thou knowest that these two years I have devoted to thee that thou mightest acquire learning—and thus fit thyself for any high place that the Gods, in their wisdom, might design for thee!

MAYA [*lovingly—gratefully*] Aye! I know. [*Tensely*] But, thou hast spoken of this before! What meanest thou! What high place could the Gods design for me, a beggar-girl?

RAM DAS [*hesitates, dissembles*] What the Gods design, the Gods reveal—all in due time.

MAYA [*piqued; mischievously*] And—what of thy design?

RAM DAS [*slightly startled*] My design?

MAYA. Aye! Oh, thou hast some great design! Thou art not easy to fathom, even for a woman; yet I have fathomed something—that thou hast a design.

Aye! And one in which thou meanest me to play a part.

RAM DAS. Thou art right!

MAYA. That is nice. A great part? [*Delightedly*].

RAM DAS. Aye!

MAYA. What part?

RAM DAS. My design, and thy part in it—also shall be revealed in due time.

MAYA. Now?

RAM DAS. Nay!

MAYA. Yea!

RAM DAS. Nay!

MAYA. If thou lovest me thou wilt reveal it now.

RAM DAS. Sayest thou? Then I love thee not! [*Whimsically*].

MAYA. Oh!

RAM DAS. Maya! My beloved, the time is not yet come. So question me no more.

MAYA [*eyes him, sees he is serious, humbly facing him*] Thy pardon.

RAM DAS. Tell me, art come to pray again?

MAYA. Place it upon the altar [*extends garland*].

RAM DAS [*taking garland and bouquet to altar*]
For rain?

MAYA. And for food to be sent—to put an end to our sufferings.

RAM DAS. And—dost believe thy prayer will be answered? [*Back to foots placing flower on altar*].

MAYA. Surely! Why asketh thou that? Thou knowest my faith! Rain will come. Food will be

sent if only our faith be strong. All things are possible through faith—thou hast taught me that thyself!

RAM DAS. Aye! And it is so! But faith in what?

MAYA. Why—in the Great Goddess! [*Indicates Image up C*]

RAM DAS. Thy faith—is in that? [*Pauses, hardens—shock*].

Maya nods half in fright.

RAM DAS. But have I not told thee that is but an image—a hollow image?

MAYA. Aye! And when I asked thee why it was hollow and not solid, thou wouldst not say, but put me off! But I found out! The High Priest himself explained it all to me! [*Mischievously*].

RAM DAS. I see! And how did he explain its hollowness to thee? Why is it hollow? [*From here, the idealist with but one major thought*].

MAYA. Because—the Goddess herself lives within it. [*Intuitively knowing she has aroused the storms: on defence*].

RAM DAS. And how doth she live—in the spirit or in flesh?

MAYA. In both.

RAM DAS. Oh! [*Worst fears realized, controls himself*]. And how can the Great Goddess live there within yon image in the flesh? Upon what doth she subsist?

MAYA. Why, upon the offerings at the altar.

RAM DAS. Maya ! This last month I have neglected thee—

MAYA. Thou hast indeed ! [*Welcomes change of thought*].

RAM DAS. And in one short month, through my neglect I much fear I have done thee grievous harm !

MAYA. Thou lovest me, thou couldst not do me harm !

RAM DAS. Those we love most, often we harm most—through our neglect ! Maya—I fear that thy innocent and childlike faith, thy heritage from the Gods, in which I—even I—was content to leave thee, I fear that hath become but a belief in the fairytale of a priest. I fear thy FAITH hath become but a BELIEF that is a delusion and a sham !

MAYA. Nay ! Nay ! Thou dost me injustice ! My faith is strong !

RAM DAS. In what ? In the word of a priest, the High Priest, Father Abhiram !

MAYA. O my beloved ! What have I done that thou—

RAM DAS. What hast thou done ? Thy woman's curiosity hath flung thee headlong into the gaping maw of priestcraft ! Already hath thy credulity been played upon ! Already thou believest in priestly farrago ! Next thy fears will be exploited, and in turn, the whole age-old formula will be employed to dull thy reason, destroy thy will and bind thee to the blind fanatical fetishism which is the very life-blood of priestcraft ! What hast thou done !

MAYA. My beloved?—I—

RAM DAS. So! Thou hast come to believe implicitly in Father Abhiram!

MAYA. He is the High Priest—[*apologetically*].

RAM DAS. And what if that belief in him be shattered?

MAYA. SHATTERED! It could not be!

RAM DAS. But if it were shattered [*forcibly*]?

MAYA. I think—even my belief in the Great Goddess herself—would vanish.

RAM DAS. Perhaps it were best that it should.

MAYA. Nay! What then would be left to me?

RAM DAS. Truth, perchance!

MAYA. Truth?

RAM DAS. Which, perchance, I might reveal to thee!

MAYA. With my faith in the Goddess destroyed, could I believe in thee?

RAM DAS. Truth is neither a matter of belief or unbelief! Truth is knowledge!

MAYA. But—how shall I know truth IS truth—if thou dost reveal it to me?

RAM DAS. Thou wilt feel! Truth revealeth itself! Thou wilt know!

MAYA. But—how shall I KNOW I know and not just BELIEVE I know?

RAM DAS. The Divine within thee will leave no room for doubt.

MAYA. But that is how I feel now.

RAM DAS. Sayest thou! Then I say to thee that the pure, and holy, and God-given faith in which I left thee hath become but a pitiful thing! That will not withstand the test, even of thy own conscience! That will fail thee when thou shalt need it most! That will vanish when in conflict with love, desire, passion, or reason! I say to thee that soon thou shalt realise the hollowness of thy new-found belief in priests and shall learn of the unholy mockery of this holy temple.

MAYA. Oh! Thy words are sacrilege! Art thou mad?

RAM DAS. Mad? Disillusioned!

MAYA. Thou! To speak like that! A priest thyself—of the Great Mother—daily performing the rites at the holy altar! Oh! I shall pray to the Great Mother to—

RAM DAS. Nay! Nay! Save thy prayers! Waste not thy breath in unavailing petition to yon mocking image! Thinkest thou, prayers are heard by wood and clay?

MAYA. WOOD! CLAY! [*Horried*].

RAM DAS. WOOD! CLAY!—A little brass that passeth for gold! Jewels—of glass! The whole as much a sham as my priestly robe, thy priestly belief! I tell thee yon image is hollow MERELY to match in hollowness the FALSITY of those who caused it to be fashioned!

MAYA. Thou art mad!

RAM DAS. Nay! They only are mad, who with reason at their command, fail to employ it to divine the false from the true!

MAYA. Hast thou forsaken the belief of thy fathers? Hast thou become Christian or of another faith?

RAM DAS [*tensely, vehemently*] When all are as priestridden as this? Nay! Why change? When all religions are dead and shrouded—in dogma, ritual, creed, PRIESTCRAFT!

MAYA. Oh! I understand thee not! But tell me this—thou dost not believe in the Goddess standing there?

RAM DAS. Believe? I? In that?

MAYA. Oh! ! ! [*Holds in horror*].

RAM DAS. I did believe ONCE! Aye, Maya, even as thou! Believed in her wisdom, power, justice and mercy! I too, prayed to her—worshipped her with devotion and trust! I did believe once!

MAYA. Once?

RAM DAS. Aye—Once!

MAYA. And NOW—If thou art not mad thou art not only a disbeliever, not only a blasphemer—but in continued sacrilege perform the rites upon the holy altar!

RAM DAS. Aye! For with disillusionment cometh truth! My senses freed from passionate and unreasoning devotion, enable me without prejudice to direct the footsteps of the unenlightened.

MAYA. Thou art become an infidel then!

RAM DAS., Nay! My faith is purer than ever.

MAYA. Thou ART an infidel! And not content with having achieved thine own damnation, thou seekest to drag others down—to destroy their faith!

RAM DAS. I have learnt the truth—which, revealed to the people, will once and for all time put an end to sham!

MAYA. I tell thee thy hypocritical service at the holy altar is SACRILEGE! I wonder the Great Goddess doth not blast thee to destruction for it!

RAM DAS. Thou wonderest why? I will tell thee why! Because she is powerless before those who fear her not! Because she is but the incarnation of an idea, the representation of a hope! Because she is but a soul-less, spiritless thing of wood and clay and brass and glass!

MAYA. I will listen no longer to thy blasphemy, to do so were to sin myself!

RAM DAS. Maya— [*almost the prophet*].

Jaichand enters quietly L and holds on seeing duo.

RAM DAS. The veil that hath blinded my eye hath been rent! My vision hath pierced the web of deceit and seen the truth which lies behind. In the anguish of bitter disillusionment have I come to realise the mockery of all this— [*emotionally*] and thou too shall realise it! I swear it—by all my love for thee—my LIVING Goddess!

MAYA. Speak not to me of thy love! If thou

canst be so false to the Great Mother, canst thou be aught but false to me!

RAM DAS. Aye! For THEE I WORSHIP—with all tenderness and devotion! [*Passionately, the lover only*] Maya! O my beloved! Turn not away from me! I have builded within my heart a prison house for thee, my love its gaoler, happiness and truth its bars!

MAYA. [*turns to exit coldly*] I have loved—thee more than thou canst ever know. But henceforth thy footsteps and mine tread different paths! My FAITH is sacred and cannot yield place—even to thee! The time of parting hath come.

RAM DAS. Maya! Wilt thou indeed forsake me? Lovest thou me no more? Is not thy love for me greater than thy belief in the word of a High Priest?

MAYA. Love? Thee? CAN I love—such as thou? [*Exits down R*].

RAM DAS [*tensely, apostrophizing her exit*] Sayest thou! Yet I tell thee that THY FATE and MINE are as ONE, and even as thou shalt lose thy belief in priestcraft thou shalt find a new faith through me!

JAICHAND [*xing to Ram Das with line and picking up and carrying on the previous scene to the curtain*] Ram Das, that girl is a danger!

RAM DAS. A danger? Aye! To this—to that—[*indicates the image and the temple*] the lever by which both shall be overturned!

JAICHAND. Nay! Nay! To thee—to me!



—That Girl is a DANGER—

RAM DAS. She oweth all, even life, to me!

JAICHAND. She is a woman! Will chatter! Chatter of thy words to the High Priest!

RAM DAS. Nay—before she hath either the inclination or the opportunity to do so her beautiful belief in Father Abhiram and that [*indicating image*] shall turn to virulent hate!

JAICHAND. Thou lovest this beggar-girl and in love for a woman there is EVER danger. Thou hast told me only fools believe in images! I tell thee only greater fools believe in woman!

RAM DAS. Then I am one of the greater fools! Yet—if it will ease thy mind, hasten after Maya and quieten her tongue if she doth chatter and—[*meaningly, thinking of his plot only*] contrive that she sees the lambs and other livestock thou hast hidden in the Little Temple.

JAICHAND. Let Maya—see the lambs?

RAM DAS. Aye! At once! It is necessary for—what I have in mind!

JAICHAND. But! I understand not why!

RAM DAS. If thou didst, then thou, and not I, might be the one to overthrow the High Priest—and take his place. Go. [*Holds eyeing L-2*].

Jaichand hesitates, eyeing Ram Das, then slowly exits R.

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO.

BEFORE THE SHRINE OF THE GODDESS

Mid-afternoon of the following day.

At curtain rise Ram Das and other priests are discovered on altar steps.

RAM DAS [*facing priests*] And now—prepare for the sacrifice which Father ABHIRAM hath ordered!

NAREN. A sacrifice of propitiation?

RAM DAS. Nay—of thanksgiving.

NAREN. Thanksgiving! With the people all but starving! With the land parched from lack of rain?

RAM DAS. So the High Priest hath ordered.

NAREN. I like it not!

1ST PRIEST. Nor I!

NAREN. Nor do I like the sleek and well-fed appearance of some of our number! It ill beseemeth us to gorge while famine dogs the people!

CHARAN [*eyeing Naren*] Thou needst not look at me like that! 'Tis not that I eat more but thou eatest less than—than the spiritual fitness demands!

NAREN. Spiritual fitness? Physical fatness!

CHARAN. We but devour that which by command of our High Priest is set before us!

NAREN. The half of what thou devourest would feed a family!

CHARAN. 'Is it not necessary that we, the beloved of the Great Mother, preserve our accustomed well-being even in famine-time? Aye, it proveth to the ignorant how the Great Mother careth for the Faithful.

NAREN. What sayest thou, Ram Das?

RAM DAS [*whimsically*] I say that a sage, reformer or a prophet preaches Truth in all its simplicity. Then a priestcraft arises to systematize it in all duplicity. Yet sage and priest alike seem to have their missions since both flourish in their season.

CHARAN. And which dost deem thyself to be—sage, reformer, prophet or fool?

RAM DAS Perchance but an honest man who finds himself among knaves.

CHARAN. Or a knave amongst honest men?

RAM DAS. Nay, since we are all priests, that cannot be. I may be a knave amongst knaves, I will grant thee that. [*Authoritatively dropping argument*] And now to your tasks. Robin! come thou with me.

All Priests except Naren and Charan exit with Ram Das.

CHARAN. A knave amongst honest men! Aye. That thou art. And thou too, Goatbeard. [*Eyes Naren*].

NAREN [*gesturing Charan aside*] Grow to man's size before speaking with a man, Oh Thing, that thinkest itself a man.

CHARAN [*reacts angrily, comes to Naren*] Food will not give thee rest by day and an uneasy conscience preventeth thee from sleep at night. Truly, the path to sainthood must be hard. [*Chuckles at his repartee*].

NAREN. Thou eatest the food of five yet it doth thee no good. Even food knoweth better than to nourish such as thou.

CHARAN [*reacts angrily, seeks a retort, gets one, smiles, goes up to Naren and suavely*] Thou wilt be a black-beetle one day and I shall step upon thee.

SHAMBHU [*enters*] Pranama! Pranama! Pranama! Am I too late?

CHARAN. There's nothing strange in that. Thou art ever too late. Tell me, hast thou brought thy offerings? [*Down to Shambhu with hand out for gift*].

SHAMBHU. Nay! Nay! [*Drawing away down R*].

CHARAN. Spendthrift! [*Exits R angrily*].

SHAMBHU [*eyes Charan off, chuckles delightedly*] My grandsons may pay thee prayer-money to fill thy priestly pouch but not I—Not I!

Naren faces Shambhu and towards him a step, holds severely.

SHAMBHU [*sees Naren, sickly laughs, cover it effusively*] Pranama, Father Naren, Pranama—

Naren holds eyeing Shambhu, without relenting.

SHAMBHU [*sickly laughs indicating departing Charan, then effusively*] Ah, if only ALL were as

thou and Father Ram Das, what a world this then would be. Truly, thou and he possess the knowledge that passeth all understanding.

NAREN [*coming to Shambhu, severely*] We understand thee—if that be thy meaning?

SHAMBHU [*edges L uncomfortably*] That—is not my meaning. Yet we DO understand one another.

NAREN. At least WE understand THEE. [*Xs to L-2, turns, heaves deep breath of compassion, faces Shambhu*] Thou art not so GREATLY to blame.

SHAMBHU [*quick alibi, anxiously eyeing Naren*] I am not to blame at all. To blame for what?

NAREN. For BEING [*shakes head in sympathy*] what thou art. [*Turns to exit*].

SHAMBHU [*anxiously*] For what I ART? WHAT I ART? WHAT art I?

NAREN. Thyself.

SHAMBHU. Is one to blame for being that? [*At a loss*].

NAREN. One to blame? Nay. Two. [*Turns L to exit*].

SHAMBHU. Two! Who?

NAREN. Even as it taketh two to make a quarrel—

SHAMBHU. Aye? Aye?

NAREN. So it doth to make a money-lender. [*Exits L-2*].

Shambhu holds, eyeing Naren's exit, at a loss: thinks for a moment: gives it up, turns up C, picks out a stone at R end of altar and drops

his kneeling bolster, kneels upon it laboriously then recites in low monotone his daily prayer.

SHAMBHU :

O Goddess ! Hear this little plea
Which poor Shambhu presents to thee !
Heed not what other prayers there be
They must distract and weary thee.
My back—it aches ! My knees—are sore !
Through kneeling on this hard, hard floor !
Much wealth and profit I can gain
If thou'lt hold back the monsoon rain !
So this, if thou please, thou canst do.
It will help so thy poor Shambhu !

At the end of the prayer Jaichand enters to look for Ram Das. On seeing Shambhu he relaxes somewhat from his tense poise and watches him with a cynical smile. Shambhu, unaware of his presence, grunts and fusses in arranging himself comfortably.

JAICHAND. Hast thou seen Father Ram Das ?
[Pauses]. Hast seen Father Ram Das ? [A little louder]. Hast seen Father Ram, Das ? [Louder still].

SHAMBHU. Interrupt not my devotions, I am a sinful man.

JAICHAND. All know that ! Hast seen Father Ram Das ?

SHAMBHU. Give me an anna and thou canst give me thy message to him [right hand out].

JAICHAND.* And interrupt thy devotions? Nay, I'll wait. [*Sits on heel L-C, eyeing altar*].

SHAMBHU. I would pray in comfort [*fidgets uncomfortably*].

JAICHAND. So I perceive.

SHAMBHU. THOU makest me UNCOMFORTABLE—I will not be watched at my devotions!

JAICHAND. I am not watching thee, I am watching the offerings.

SHAMBHU. What meanest thou by that?

JAICHAND. I mean, what thou thinkest I mean.

SHAMBHU [*plaintively*] Then thou dost wrong me—and I cannot pray, knowing I am being wronged in the thought of anyone. [*To feet, picking up bolster glares at Jaichand, comes down to him*] And upon THY head be the evil that may befall me if I am prevented from prayer.

JAICHAND [*calmly*] Nay, not upon my head THY shares of evil. Thou canst not blame ME for the justice meted out to thee by the Gods.

SHAMBHU. Ssh! Ssh! [*Dropping bolster, in alarm, whispers*] Speak not so loudly of justice—the Gods may hear.

JAICHAND. Dost believe there ARE Gods?

SHAMBHU. I believe—one should EVER preserve an open mind upon such matters.

JAICHAND. And a closed purse.

SHAMBHU [*faces Jaichand angrily*] My purse is EVER open—to all my FRIENDS.

JAICHAND. HAST thou one? [*Rises, feigns surprise*].

SHAMBHU. Is that MY fault? ALL are my friends in their need. And, where there is no need there is no money-lender.

JAICHAND. IS there such a place? [*Towards Shambhu eagerly*].

SHAMBHU. Why dost THOU ask? [*Faces Jaichand keenly, eyes him*].

JAICHAND. I would go to it.

SHAMBHU. Jaichand! thou art a rude fellow.

JAICHAND [*gestures accusation aside*] The High Priest hath called me that.

SHAMBHU [*plaintively*] I came hither for peace and solitude.

JAICHAND. Thou shouldst seek the jungles.

SHAMBHU [*nervously*] Nay. There be tigers there—and robbers such as thou.

JAICHAND. But none so GREAT as THOU [*feigning admiration*]. They will make thee chief.

Ram Das enters quickly L-2, pauses L-4 on seeing Shambhu, reacts angrily facing Jaichand, takes in situation, meaning glance at Jaichand.

SHAMBHU [*quick change artist, Pranams to Ram Das*] Pranama, Pranama! Thy blessings, father!

JA CHAND. Aye. Thy blessings, Father! [*Playing the game*].

RAM DAS [*comes to C whimsically*] Peace be with thee, my robber children. Even such peace as THOU bringest to the countryside.

JAICHAND. And a very good blessing too.

SHAMBHU. Ever doth a money-lender brings peace to ALL.

RAM DAS. Hast finished thy devotions?

SHAMBHU. Devotions? Devo—? Oh, that? Aye.

RAM DAS. Then leave us.

SHAMBHU. Leave—?

RAM DAS. Aye.

SHAMBHU. Aye. I am leaving. Pranama Holy Father, Pranama! [*Helpless gesture, wishes to stay, Pranams and exits R*].

RAM DAS. Well?

JAICHAND. We are losing fast.

RAM DAS. We can never lose. Our purpose is great.

JAICHAND. But not our methods.

RAM DAS. Means do not matter. The end is the thing.

JAICHAND. I am a dacoit, my work is to rob and despoil. I know naught of thy philosophy. But this I know that bad means cannot lead to a good end.

RAM DAS. Nay, nay. I will not have anything to do with thy morbid utterances. Within my ravished soul fairer ambitions spring phoenix-like from the ashes of past failures. Stronger vows tremble upwards to the Gods in heaven—for great is my mission and greater still is the power that dwells within me and works through me towards the undiscerned heights. I cannot—I will not go back.

JAICHAND. 'Twere better to go back and begin again than to court failures.

RAM DAS. Jaichand! Thou must not be one of those faint hearts who stand wringing their hands and feebly protesting, what's the good! The call is to prepare the way—now is the time to prepare.

JAICHAND. As thou sayest. I am here only to obey thee. Maya hath seen the lambs hidden in the Little Temple—recognised some.

RAM DAS. Where did'st thou leave her?

JAICHAND. At Seeta's hut. Weaving a garland for her lamb.

RAM DAS. Ah!

JAICHAND. Why did'st thou order me to leave Maya her lamb, while taking all the others?

RAM DAS. Thou shalt see—soon! Return to Maya! Warn her to say nothing of the lambs she hath seen.

JAICHAND. Why?

RAM DAS. Why? So that she will wonder why—even as thou! [*Hears clang of door L-2, glances L*].

Jaichand darts glance L-2 and exits down L. Abhiram enters L-2 alertly, pauses on seeing Ram Das, eyes him tensely.

RAM DAS. Pranama—O, my Father!

ABHIRAM. Tut, tut, tut! We are alone. We understand one another, there is no need for us to dissemble.

RAM DAS. True.

RAM DAS. Oh my Father, thou said, thou felt I had all but succeeded thee already?

ABHIRAM.* Aye?

RAM DAS. Thy words have puzzled me exceedingly, worried me. What meant thou?

ABHIRAM. I meant—what thou and I know well.—that all that hath been done to bring the people back to their former faith hath been solely due to thee.

RAM DAS. Nay, O my Father, thine hath been the thought, the divine inspiration, mine but the hand, the act.

ABHIRAM. And often thy acts have overrun my thoughts. What of this voice? This warning voice which hath been heard so often of late—and of which I have heard of but now?

RAM DAS. That voice hath been but part of my plan, whereby to bring my GREAT design to a speedy fruition.

ABHIRAM. Thy GREAT DESIGN? What meanest THOU?

RAM DAS [*easily*] I design to bring light to the BLIND, knowledge to the IGNORANT—to bring the people to truth, to abolish sham, and deceit and hypocrisy.

ABHIRAM. Sayest thou? [*Menacingly*] And what part dost thou mean to play in thy great design? Aye. And what part dost design ME to play?

RAM DAS. Since thine was the inspiration, and since from THEE arose the thought which I hope to translate into action, thine, of course, the reward.

ABHIRAM. What reward?

RAM DAS. What greater reward than 'to rest in the bosom of the Great Goddess for all time?

ABHIRAM. Thou art not so simple as thou wouldst be thought.

RAM DAS. Nay?

ABHIRAM. Nor am I as simple as thou thinkest!

RAM DAS. Of all the thoughts that I have ever of thee, I have never thought of thee as being simple—O my Father.

ABHIRAM. Nor I, thee—O my son. In that at least we are alike. [*Blandly*] Mayhap it is because of our likeness that I love thee so well. Mayhap thou art the mirror in which I see again my lost youth. Say now, besides this voice, what of this blood that hath been smeared upon the doors of the people? What of this warning, in letters of blood purporting to be from the Great Mother herself?

RAM DAS [*pretending surprise*] O my Father—knowest thou naught of that?

ABHIRAM. O my son—WHAT knowest thou of that?

RAM DAS. Thinkest thou I would dare employ the name of the Great Mother without thy permission?

ABHIRAM. Aye! I think thou might.

RAM DAS. Not unless I felt I had direct inspiration to do so.

ABHIRAM. And—hast thou had such direct inspiration?

RAM DAS., CAN such inspiration come from the Great Mother except through the medium of her High Priest?

ABHIRAM. Nay!

RAM DAS. Then—how CAN I have had such direct inspiration?

ABHIRAM. Ram Das! Thou canst not deceive me with words!

RAM DAS. Then, O my Father, since we are alone, since we understand one another, since thou sayest there is no need to dissemble—

ABHIRAM. That time is past.

RAM DAS. Well then, not as priest to priest, but as man to man—

ABHIRAM. Aye! Be it so! As man to man!

RAM DAS. I swear to thee in all sincerity that unless I felt I had direct inspiration to employ any means to bring the people to the truth—this warning voice—this blood-smeared warning of the Mother—I would not have employed such means. As thou sayest thou alone CAN have had such direct inspiration then out of thy own lips am I acquitted. AND even so must thou acquit me when thou shalt learn through Bhakat and thy other spies of this OTHER that lately hath come to be upon the lips and within the thoughts of all!

ABHIRAM [*alarmed*] What—OTHER?

RAM DAS. This rumour—that already the Great Mother hath come among her people in the guise of a beggar-girl—that by life amongst them she

may know clearly their wants and sufferings, may know the sincerity of those who have set themselves up as her interpreters, may know their injustice—aye, and the crimes they perpetrate in her Holy Name!

ABHIRAM. Art threatening me, Abhiram, the High Priest?

RAM DAS. I? Threaten thee? Threaten thee, who loveth me so well? I but repeat the gossip of the market-place and the country-side, as man to man.

ABHIRAM. Why—didst thou not tell me of this before?

RAM DAS. I did not feel that I could speak to thee as man to man, before!

ABHIRAM. And NOW, thou dost! Thou art become very confident, O my son. Over-confident perchance!

RAM DAS. Perchance. If so, mine the blame.

ABHIRAM. Even as man to man thou canst not speak plainly!

RAM DAS. Then—if my words have not been clear, my deeds must make them so.

BHAKAT [*from off stage ad lib*] I tell thee I must see the Holy Father.

VOICE OFF. And I tell thee he is at prayer!

RAM DAS. It is thy beloved Bhakat!

Abhiram relaxing eagerly.

BHAKAT. And I tell thee, prayer or no prayer, I must see him—to give him warning.

BHAKAT. Some believed, some doubted. But this morning, O my Father,—all, doubters and believers alike, woke to find all their livestock gone or slaughtered. Aye! And upon every door writ in letters of blood, “Beware my wrath! Beware the coming and vengeance of the Great Goddess!”

ABHIRAM [*eyeing Ram Das triumphantly*] So! That WERE sacrilege!

RAM DAS. UNLESS—the handiwork of the Great Mother herself!

BHAKAT. Oh—none doubt that it is! None NOW, doubt that the Great Goddess IS amongst us unknown! Come to divine our wants!

RAM DAS. And so, terror-stricken and therefore repentent—the people hasten here to be saved!

BHAKAT. Thou sayest! [*Hears approaching crowd off R, xs R and listens at doors*].

RAM DAS. Canst thou save them, O my Father? [*Eyes Abhiram sardonically*].

ABHIRAM. Can I—? Save them—? [*Eyes Ram Das fearfully*].

BHAKAT. They come! The people come!

ABHIRAM. Close the door!

Bhakat closes door R, listens.

ABHIRAM. Ram Das—thou art an enigma! I understand thee not! One moment—and the next—? Can I save the people? Thou hast a thought?

RAM DAS. Only this. People ever expect to be saved merely for the asking—and favours READILY granted are never treasured at full value.

ABHIRAM. Aye, that is so! Yet, perchance, it were wiser to conciliate?

RAM DAS. Surely, if that be thy mood.

ABHIRAM. My MOOD—is to teach these villagers that faith in the Great Goddess and her High Priest is not a bangle to be worn or discarded at pleasure.

RAM DAS. And—is not thy MOOD but a reflection of that of the Great One yonder?

ABHIRAM. Wilt thou answer one question frankly?

RAM DAS. Surely.

ABHIRAM. What is thy innermost and secret thought—at this very instant?

RAM DAS. Of what I would do—were I in thy place.

ABHIRAM. And what wouldst thou do?

BHAKAT. The people clamour for admittance.

ABHIRAM. Wait.

Priests enter R and group round altar. Bhakat listens at door R.

ABHIRAM. What wouldst thou do?

RAM DAS. I would change the sacrifice of thanksgiving to one of intercession and—admit the people to witness it.

ABHIRAM. Whatever may BE thy innermost and secret thought, at least thy WORDS are good! Is everything in readiness?

RAM DAS. Bhakat! Thine was the duty. Is all in readiness for the sacrifice?

BHAKAT. Aye! Except the sacrifice itself.

ABHIRAM. What!



—Thou hast a Thought—

ABHIRAM* [*tenses anxiously*] Warning! Admit him! Admit him!

RAM DAS [*opens door R a little*] Bhakat, thou art bursting with importance!

BHAKAT. Glorious tidings, for Father Abhiram! [*Still off R*].

ABHIRAM. Admit him! Admit him! Admit him!

RAM DAS. Enter. [*Calling off R*].

BHAKAT [*enters hurriedly, prostrates himself before Abhiram*] Pranama, O my Father! Pranama!

RAM DAS. The Holy Father hath just but finished a prayer.

ABHIRAM. Aye! Mayhap thou bringest the answer! Thy tidings, Bhakat?

BHAKAT. First, thy blessings, O my Father.

ABHIRAM. Blessings at a time like this! [*Gabbles blessings*] Peace be unto thee and unto thy children—[*Transition, fretfully*] Oh, get up, get up! Thy tidings?

BHAKAT. Nay, only upon my knees should I voice such glorious tidings!

ABHIRAM. Well then UPON thy knees! What hath happened?

BHAKAT. A miracle! A miracle!

ABHIRAM. What? A miracle? And I not there? Impossible! What—what miracle?

BHAKAT. At last—at last the people awaken to the fear of the Great Goddess and thee.

ABHIRAM. But that is no miracle! That is but the answer to my prayer!

BHAKAT [*rising*] Miracle or prayer, whichever it may be—

ABHIRAM. Dost doubt it WAS my prayer!

BHAKAT. Nay! Nay! In ANSWER to thy prayer the people hasten here, to seek thy intercession, to offer atonement for their sin, to pray to the Great Mother for forgiveness, mercy!

ABHIRAM. Ah! [*Triumphantly; then anxiously*] But Bhakat—what hath so SUDDENLY brought the people penitent to beseech my compassion?

RAM DAS. What but thy many hours of prayer before the holy altar, O my Father!

ABHIRAM. Ah,—not quite so confident NOW, perchance.

RAM DAS. Perchance.

BHAKAT. Thy PRAYERS undoubtedly, my Father. But then too—all this last week a voice hath been heard by many.

ABHIRAM. A warning voice?

BHAKAT. Aye!

ABHIRAM. Jai! Jai! At last—my people have heard! What hath it said?

BHAKAT. It hath called out—"The time is nigh! The hour of divine appointment approacheth! The Great Mother is already amongst you unknown! Beware!"

RAM DAS. All this last week, thou sayest, and 'tis but now that the people heed this divine warning? Why?

ABHIRAM. Why?—why?

faces villagers. Villagers' subdued voices, hands raised to Abhiram in supplication.

ABHIRAM [*raises hand for silence, impressively, feigns mild surprise*] What is this? I had thought strangers were clamouring for admittance to the Holy Shrine.

Villagers' murmur of awe and fear.

ABHIRAM [*rebuikingly*] Indeed, ye have been as strangers!

Villagers stir uneasily, murmur.

ABHIRAM. My children—

Villagers quiet instantly, eye Abhiram hopefully.

ABHIRAM. Are ye indeed returned to me? In fear and penitence to make atonement? [*Change to menace*] Or—have ye come to complete past neglect!

VILLAGERS. Nay! Nay! Nay!

VOICE. We come to be saved!

VOICE. We come in fear—

VOICE. In penitence—

VOICE. To make atonement—

VOICE. To be saved ~~from~~ wrath!

VILLAGERS. Aye! Aye! Aye!

ABHIRAM. Peace! Peace be with you—all! The mercy of the Great Goddess is infinite—

Ram Das eyes Abhiram, shakes head warningly.

ABHIRAM [*catches Ram Das shaking head changes*] Even as her vengeance—is terrible!

Villagers murmur in fear.

Ram Das nods approvingly to Abhiram.

ABHIRAM. YET I say—peace be with you. Peace!

1ST VOICE. Aye! Peace! Holy Mother grant peace to me and mine! The peace of death!

Villagers murmur in fear.

ABHIRAM. Death! Speak not here of death! The Great Mother is the giver of Life—new Life!

2ND VOICE. Life! Thou speakest of life! What hope of life is left! The Great Mother hath eaten my substance, hath taken my all.

VILLAGERS. Aye! Aye! [*Murmur in fear*].

ABHIRAM. Silence! [*Menacingly*] The Mother hath taken all? Nay! What of your lives! Aye, and what of that which is beyond all life? What, if in HER DIVINE WRATH the Great Mother taketh THAT from ye?

Villagers murmur in terror, prostrate themselves.

ABHIRAM. Dare to repeat such sacrilege and perchance ye shalt be granted your prayers for death!

2ND VOICE. Have mercy! Have mercy!

ABHIRAM. Go!

VOICE. Father—

RAM DAS. O my Father! Be not angry with thy children! They are but children! They repent already, in fear and trembling! Be not angry!

VILLAGERS. Be not angry! Have pity! Have mercy!

Abhiram feigns to hesitate.

RAM DAS. O my Father! O THOU beloved of the Great Goddess! O THOU, who art the interpreter

RAM DAS. [*dissembling*] What sayest thou? No sacrifice!

BHAKAT. Not MINE the fault, O my Father! I scoured the village and the countryside near-by—but no lamb hath been spared from the wrath of the Great Mother!

ABHIRAM. All—have been slaughtered?

BHAKAT. Aye!

RAM DAS. What of that belonging to Maya, the beggar-girl? THAT hath not been slaughtered!

ABHIRAM. Ah! So THAT—hath been spared?

RAM DAS. Aye!

ABHIRAM. And HOW dost thou know?

RAM DAS. Jaichand came to tell me, but now. Said she was weaving a garland for it by her hut.

ABHIRAM. And SO—out of universal slaughter the lamb of this beggar-girl, of the girl thou lovest, hath been miraculously preserved?

RAM DAS. So it would seem.

NAREN [*excitedly*] Father Abhiram! May it not be—! This Maya! This beggar-girl who appeared amongst us two years ago! No one knows whence she came—her lamb alone spared—the rumours that the Great Goddess is amongst us unknown—! May not this Maya—may not SHE be the incarnation of the Great Goddess herself!

Priests excitedly talk among themselves.

ABHIRAM. Nay! If so, her High Priest would have been warned in advance!

RAM DAS. And—thou—hast NOT ,been SO warned?

Abhiram hesitates, then defiantly. Priests excitedly talk among themselves.

ABHIRAM. Silence!

Priests give attention to Abhiram.

ABHIRAM. My sons! The sacrifice of thanksgiving for the return of my children, which I foresaw, shall be blended with one of 'intercession against their further punishment. [*Meaningly eyeing Ram Das*] The Merciful Mother is thirsty! The blood of a pure white lamb must quench Her thirst! Bhakat, bring thou such a lamb. Go! Make haste!

RAM DAS. Wait! [*To Bhakat—turns to Abhiram*] She will not give it to Bhakat—'tis better I go!

ABHIRAM. THOU—wilt remain here!

Priests tense, expecting rebellion.

RAM DAS [*after a moment's pause*] As thou sayest!

ABHIRAM. Bhakat! Bring thou the lamb!

Bhakat exits. Naren speaks to Ram Das.

ABHIRAM [*turning to priests at door R*] Admit them!

Ram Das xs to incense burner down R. Abhiram starts chant before altar and facing the Image. Priests group about the altar, Naren opens door R. Villagers' off R subdued murmur, then it stops; they enter and to their knees facing the altar and the priests. Priests stop chant. Abhiram slowly

ABHIRAM., And—art content, my daughter?
[*Beamingly*].

KRIPA. Thy will be mine, O my Father.

ABHIRAM. Ah! [*Turns to villagers*] SUCH is perfect faith! And in reward—who knows—perchance upon thy return to thy dwelling—.

KRIPA. But I have no dwelling! That too has gone—burnt!

ABHIRAM [*taken aback, recovers*] Sayest thou! Then thou shalt be provided with a new one! As a reward for thy perfect faith! And perchance the Great Mother herself will send thee food!

VILLAGERS. Jai! Jai! Jai! Food! We want food!

ABHIRAM [*menacingly*] And doubt you the Great Goddess CAN provide food for all, if it be HER will?

VILLAGERS. Now! Feed us now!

ABHIRAM. Silence!—Silence!—Silence! Is this a market-place wherein to howl your grievances? Have you so soon forgotten last night's vengeance and the warning upon your doors?

RAM DAS [*stirring up the villagers though pretending to advance Abhiram's argument*] Aye! And have you forgotten the VOICE proclaiming the Great Goddess, as yet unknown BUT already in your very midst!

Villagers eye Ram Das: murmur of fear.

ABHIRAM [*taking advantage of Ram Das's words, eyeing him on guard*] Aye! What if the Great God-

dess herself hears your unseemingly demand for succour whilst still your faith is to be proved?

RAM DAS. And ever she appears among her children when they are full of misery, when the weak are oppressed by the strong, when wrong seemeth to have subjugated right! THEN the Great Goddess ever appears to save her children! Is it not so writ, O my Father? [*With a view to defeat him at his own game*].

ABHIRAM [*on guard*] Aye! That is the legend—so writ—but—

RAM DAS. So it is writ in Holy Writ, so the High Priest sayeth! Thus, all may be doubly sure! The Great Mother comes—ever—to save her children in their need!

VILLAGERS. Jai! Jai! [*Excitedly*].

ABHIRAM. Not that she hath come as yet! That is but an idle rumour! BUT she WILL come! And I shall be the first to know and will warn you all!

NAREN. But hath she not come already?

ABHIRAM. Seek not to penetrate holy mysteries lest thou perish in the seeking!

NAREN. When WILL she come?

ABHIRAM. At the proper time!

RAM DAS. And what time more needful than now?

VILLAGERS. Aye! Aye! Aye!

ABHIRAM. Silence! Silence!

Villagers silent.

of her Divine Will—surely, thou canst say, how these, thy children, can be saved from the wrath of the Great Mother.

VILLAGERS. Aye! Aye! [*Supplicatingly to Abhiram*].

ABHIRAM [*eyes villagers sternly, inflexibly*] Repent ye of your past sins?

VILLAGERS. Aye! Aye!

ABHIRAM. And will ye pay due homage to the Great Mother—and to us—her priests?

VILLAGERS. Aye! [*Wait expectantly*].

ABHIRAM. Then—I, Abhiram the High Priest, will myself supplicate the Great Mother; intercede in your behalf. Perchance your punishment will cease and—and great reward be your portion!

VILLAGERS. Jai! Jai!

ABHIRAM. But—! [*Menacingly*] You must have faith! And to my prayers must be added your sacrifice, for sacrifice is the measure of faith—

RAM DAS. Have they not sacrificed enough? The grain sent for their relief gone, their livestock slaughtered in the night?

ABHIRAM. THAT hath not been sacrificed! THAT hath been TAKEN from them—as DIVINE punishment!

Villagers' hush of fear.

RAM DAS. What must thy children do? What must be the measure of their sacrifice? How long must they wait ere punishment cease and deliverance come from their dire sufferings?

VILLAGERS. Aye? Aye?

ABHIRAM. They must be patient, very patient!

KRIPA. I have been patient—very patient.

VILLAGERS. Aye.

ABHIRAM. Patient? Nay! Drunk with the abundance of past blessings you have neglected the Great Goddess through weeks; aye, months! Faith, Worship, Service must be constant!

KRIPA. I have been constant! Constant in good times and in bad! But the Great Mother hath made NO exception in MY favour!

Villagers murmur against Kripa.

ABHIRAM. Is that thou, Kripa?

KRIPA. Aye, O my Father.

ABHIRAM [*blandly*] THOU hast indeed been constant. THY cow HATH been taken but ONLY to test anew thy faith. Thou shalt suffer but a little while—but a little while.

KRIPA. But—in a little while I shall be dead!

ABHIRAM [*blandly*] Even so—even so. But with death there shall come a new life for thee.

KRIPA. I am content with this. [*No sarcasm, only faith*].

ABHIRAM. Aye. And, because of that—if the Great Goddess in her wisdom GRANT thee death—in HER name I promise thee a new life far transcending this in beauty and wealth and—and comfort. Understand, Kripa? I, the High Priest, promise it.

KRIPA. I thank thee, O my Father.

ABHIRAM. I am her servant! But obey her command!

MAYA [*emotionally, not argumentatively*] But—why should the Great Goddess command thee to take the life of my pet! It is a sin to kill one's fellow-beings. Surely it is a greater sin to murder innocent, defenceless, harmless animals? They cannot even cry out for mercy! Know not their own danger! Smile trustingly into the very eyes of their murderers—and DIE—with wondering, reproachful, questioning gaze that would arouse compassion—even in a monster!

ABHIRAM. Thou hast seen sacrifice before!

MAYA. But never have I realised all that it meant before! It never touched me personally before! I never could understand why innocent lives should be sacrificed—never could bear to look upon the sacrifice—always turned shudderingly away? But never before did my heart rebel—as it doth now, at the cruel injustice of killing the innocent to expiate the sins of the guilty!

ABHIRAM. Cruelty? Injustice?—In holy sacrifice! Beware Maya! Thou art placing thy own sinful love for a beast above thy duty to the Great Goddess—

MAYA. But—if the Great Goddess hath created and loveth all her created things—how can my love for my pet be sin? If I sin in MY love, then, so doth the Great Goddess in HERS!—Or else, the Great Goddess doth NOT love that which she hath created!

ABHIRAM. Maya! Wouldst set thyself against the Divine Will?

MAYA. That were useless.

ABHIRAM. Very well—IT IS the Divine Will that thy lamb make the supreme sacrifice.

MAYA. How do I know it is the Divine Will?

ABHIRAM. How dost thou know? Why—I—Abhiram the High Priest—say it is!

MAYA. And how dost THOU know?

Villagers murmur, draw away from Maya.

ABHIRAM. I know—because—I am the interpreter of the Divine Will!

MAYA. Dost really know that, or dost merely BELIEVE thou art? Who told thee so? How dost thou know? Why should the Divine Will need an interpreter at all?

ABHIRAM [*menacingly*]. So that the ignorant such as thou KNOW her will, her power, her vengeance.

Villagers tense and breathless, eye Maya.

MAYA [*gestures them aside*]. And what of her mercy, her love, her compassion, her justice? Why dost thou not speak of them? Is it because thou art not her interpreter in these things? Nay! Nay! The Great Goddess is a woman! I am a woman! THOU canst not know her as I know her—for NO MAN can know and interpret woman! Thou thyself hast told me so.



MAYA [*off, down L: breathless fear*] Bhakat! Please! Bhakat!

BHAKAT [*enters hurriedly down L with a small lamb*] The lamb, O my Father! The lamb of sacrifice. [*Holds up lamb towards Abhiram*].

ABHIRAM. Give it to Charan!

Bhakat passes lamb to Charan. Charan takes lamb behind altar.

MAYA [*enters hurriedly down L in alarm and out of breath, pauses down L-C*] Nay! Nay! [*Pauses seeing all*].

ABHIRAM. Maya? [*Surprised and rebukingly*].

MAYA. Oh my Father! Thou dost not understand! This lamb is not of those belonging to the temple! It belongs to me—is mine!

ABHIRAM. ALL life belongs to the Great Mother who hath created it. She hath, in charity, but left a life in thy keeping for a while. Now, she demands back her own.

MAYA. O—o—oh! [*Aghast*] It is true then—what Bhakat hath told me! Thou dost demand my pet for the sacrifice?

ABHIRAM. Aye! And for it to avail, thou must give it gladly!

MAYA. Nay! Nay! I cannot!

ABHIRAM. Cannot?

VILLAGERS. Cannot? [*Murmur*].

MAYA. I love it so! As I shall my babe when I am blest with one!

ABHIRAM. Then rejoice! The more thou dost love thy pet, the greater the measure of thy sacrifice, and thou shalt be thrice blest!

MAYA. Nay! Nay! I cannot. A mother cannot give her babe to cruel death, nor can I—

ABHIRAM. Stop! Dost dare to call holy sacrifice cruel death? Sacrifice at this holy altar meaneth life—new life! The Great Mother thirsts for the blood of sacrifice—dost thou refuse to quench her thirst?

Villagers' low murmur against Maya. Ram Das all through eyeing progress of his plot, tense and waiting to take advantage. Priests into factional groups and eyeing the battle tensely, realising it is a struggle between Ram Das and Abhiram for supremacy.

ABHIRAM [*taking advantage of the villagers' sentiment*] And these—thy neighbours! Wouldst refuse the gift necessary to expiate their sins? Wouldst deny these—who have welcomed thee, a stranger? Permitted thee and Seeta to dwell in perfect security in their midst?

MAYA. Father—I—I cannot!

ABHIRAM. Shame! Shame on thee!

MAYA. But surely—life is sacred! It is not ours to give, it is not ours to take.

ABHIRAM. As the Goddess giveth life—so she taketh it away.

MAYA. But—the Goddess is not taking the life of my pet! It is thou!

ABHIRAM. "Thou—thou darest to liken thyself to the Great Goddess? This is sacrilege!

MAYA. Nay! It is not sacrilege! And if thou sayest the Great Goddess demands innocent life, I tell thee that thou dost not interpret her rightly! The shedding of blood can be demanded by no God or Goddess! Sacrifice of human life is held to be WRONG, but I tell thee that such sacrifice as this is—monstrous! •Call upon the Great Goddess herself! Let her come from the hiding place within yonder image—and let HER judge between us!

Villagers' murmur in awe and fear.

ABHIRAM. Thinkest thou the Great Goddess will favour such as thee with her divine presence! Thee, a beggar-girl! [*Baffled, on guard, fighting for place and blindly so, sensing Ram Das's hands behind it all*].

MAYA. Why not—since thou thyself hast told me that when she doth come she will come as a beggar-girl even as I!

ABHIRAM. Stop! Stop! Thy words are blasphemy! Beware! Beware! Lest the Great Goddess doth appear and—strike thee dead for thy impiety!

Villagers' murmur in fear.

MAYA. Call upon her to come forth! Call her if thou hast the power! My heart tells me that I am right and thou art wrong! If I am impious, if I do blaspheme, let the Great Mother come out from

her hiding place and strike me dead! [*Pauses prophetically*] Nay! Rather—if thou dost kill my lamb shalt thou be struck dead!

Villagers' awe, draw away in horror.

MAYA [*front in prayer*] O Great Mother! If I am wrong take my life as willing sacrifice and let the blood from my veins quench thy thirst for ever.

Gradually it has been growing a little darker, now a rumble of thunder is heard.

ABHIRAM [*menacingly*] Maya—give thou thy lamb—freely—or—or—thou shalt be outcast.

MAYA. Then outcast I will be.

ABHIRAM. Give thy lamb as a sacrifice or—it shall be slaughtered in any case!

Thunder.

MAYA [*in agony*] O—o—oh! My Father! Father Abhiram! Thou couldst not! [*Kneels pleadingly to him*].

ABHIRAM. Aye! Make ready! [*sotto-voce to Charan*].

Charan takes lamb behind altar. Priest purifies sacrificial knife at altar.

MAYA. But—why must my pet be taken? There be so many other lambs not pets!

ABHIRAM. There be no other lambs.

Ram Das's grim smile, plot working out.

MAYA. No—other—lambs? [*Eyes Abhiram at a loss*].

ABHIRAM [*thinking she will give in if she knows*] Hast not heard? In the night, the Great Mother

took vengeance upon her sinful children. Thy lamb alone hath been spared—for to-day's sacrifice.

Thunder.

MAYA. My lamb—alone—spared—? [*Pinning him down*].

Distant sheet-lightning.

ABHIRAM. Thine alone.

MAYA. Oh! [*Shrinks in horror at his lie, then hopes to absolve him*] But—all the people are not here. Thou canst not know all the other lambs were taken!

ABHIRAM. Not know? I—not know? I know—because the Great Goddess herself hath told me! [*Deeming time right to win, signals to Charan*].

Thunder.

ABHIRAM. Give thy lamb to the sacrifice?

Priest raises sacrificial knife, eyes Abhiram.

MAYA. Nay! A thousand times nay!

ABHIRAM. Give thou thy lamb!

MAYA. Nay!

Abhiram signals to priest at altar. Priest hands sword to sacrificer. Sacrificer strikes down sacrificial knife on block behind altar. THUD.

MAYA. Oh! [*Turns from intuition in time to see the knife descend, killing her lamb, holds*].

Rolling thunder.

MAYA. SO! It seems that naught will touch thy heart.

ABHIRAM. The Great Goddess— [*facing Maya sonorously*].

MAYA. Stop! Never again speak in her holy name! Never again let HER name pass thy lying lips. [*Lightning flashes*]. Thou false priest! Thou art but a sacrilegious imposter! All the livestock have not been slaughtered. What of all those thou hast hidden in the Little Temple?

ABHIRAM. Little Temple—? [*Trapped; eyes Maya, then Ram Das, then Maya*].

MAYA. Oh, they are there! I have seen them! With my own eyes! Thy priests attending them!

ABHIRAM. Thou—thou liest!

Roll thunder.

MAYA. THOU liest! Thou foresworn priest! And thou hast slain in thy own anger in the name of the Great Goddess! Thou art a MURDERER, and condemned by thy own act to death!

Loud thunder.

ABHIRAM. Thou! Thou! [*To Maya a step and is struck down by a bolt of lightning and falls before the altar*].

Lightning, crack of thunder, sheet-lightning. All ad lib alarm. Maya to altar in darkness. Stage dark.

RAM DAS. A miracle! A miracle!

PRIESTS. A miracle! A miracle!

ALL. A miracle! A miracle! [*Facing Maya, motionless*].

Stage lighter.

RAM DAS. The GODDESS! THE GODDESS!

PRIESTS. THE GODDESS!

ALL. THE GODDESS! [*Kneeling to Maya*].

Maya raises her eyes in tears, slowly looks at people at a loss.

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE

AN APPARTMENT IN THE TEMPLE.

Time : A Month Later.

Curtain rises on an empty stage.

SHAMBHU [*off up C balcony*] O Great Goddess! Hast heard my prayer? [*Appears off balcony, leans on it, tired*]. Hast heard the prayer of thy beloved? If so, then listen to thy servant. I am Shambhu..... I will not waste thy time. I am a man of business. Grant but the half of one instant and I will place my proposals before thee..... O Goddess!! O Goddess! IF thou ART indeed a Goddess thou wilt listen to my NEW prayer!..... I assure thee there is in it much of interest to thee... Grant but the third of one instant. If only from balcony..... I hear thy voice! ! I see thee—I know thou art there—somewhere. If thou art still asleep, I warn thee I can pray much longer than thou canst hope to stay asleep.....I warn thee, laziness in thy youth will bring thee laborious old age. [*Pauses; disappears from view*].

Seeta enters up L, all intent in getting jewels for Maya, comes to chest down L, and takes them out carefully.

MAYA [*enters up L, in garb of the Goddess, but no jewels, all intent on garb*] I have so longed to put it on—just to try it on—

SEETA. And my eyes have so longed to see thee robed once as thou shouldst be ever.

MAYA. Oh—aren't these beautiful! [*Business with pearls etc. During the following Seeta helps Maya to put on the jewels, girdles etc.*].

SHAMBHU [*out of sight up C to up L. In distance but near enough to be heard*] O Great Goddess! Hast heard my prayer? Hast heard the prayer of thy beloved? If so, then listen to thy servant. I am Shambhu.

MAYA [*accepts voice but still intent on jewels*] Is Shambhu still there?

SEETA. He and the crows have been croaking together since dawn.

SHAMBHU. I will not waste thy time. I am a man of business. Grant but the half of one instant and I will place my proposals before thee.

MAYA. Seeta, what proposals can Shambhu wish to place before me?

SEETA. Something that will place annas in his pouch, not thine.

SHAMBHU. O Goddess! O Goddess! If thou art INDEED a Goddess thou wilt listen to my NEW prayer.

MAYA. New prayer?

SEETA. The same old prayer.

SHAMBHU. I assure thee there is in it much of interest for thee.

MAYA. Interest for me! Oh, what can it be?

SEETA. Thou wilt know when thou hast to PAY it.

SHAMBHU. Grant but the third of one instant. If only from the balcony—I mean thy window.

MAYA. Poor Shambhu—on his knees since dawn.

SEETA. He prays in comfort—he hath a bolster beneath them.

SHAMBHU. I hear thy voice—

MAYA. Dost like me?

SEETA. Turn around.

SHAMBHU. I see thee—

MAYA. Dost like me? I like myself.

SHAMBHU. I know thou art there—somewhere.

Maya gets idea, hunts rapidly for mirror.

SEETA. What—?

MAYA. Oh, the mirror. [Exits].

Seeta looks after Maya with smile, starts arranging things at C.

SHAMBHU. I warn thee, if thou art still asleep—I can pray much longer than thou canst hope to stay asleep.

SEETA. Pray much longer and I will drop these coals upon thy head. [Goes to brazier].

SHAMBHU. I warn thee—laziness in thy youth will bring thee laborious old age.

SEETA. What must thy youth have been? [Gets idea, looks, thinks, decides] She is to see no one unless robed as the Goddess—well so she is robed. Besides, even Ram Das will forgive me making a profit from a money-lender. [Goes up to balcony].

Shambhu groans as he presumably kneels off up C

SEETA. Thou pest, be off.

SHAMBHU. O Great Goddess— [*pauses, recognising Seeta*] Oh, 'tis only thou!

SEETA. So—thou art a man of business?

SHAMBHU. Ask—anyone.

SEETA. If I permit thee to see the Goddess, what wilt thou do for me?

SHAMBHU. Sell thee anything—cheap.

Seeta turns down stage in disgust.

SHAMBHU [*alarmed*] Nay, nay, Seeta, I did but jest. [*Appears hurriedly with pillow*].

SEETA. Waste not my time. What wilt thou give me?

SHAMBHU. I—I will not bargain with thee, O Mother of Goddess. But times are hard, my interest money is not being paid.

SEETA. Is that my fault?

SHAMBHU. The fault is someone's—it is not mine—it may be thine. These things are indeed a puzzle—but I will not bargain with thee. Three rupees and not one anna more.

SEETA. Eight annas more—await me at the little door and thou shalt come within.

SHAMBHU. And speak to her?

SEETA. Face to face.

SHAMBHU. Which door?

SEETA. At the side—by the angle of the wall—where 'tis broken— [*indicating up and down L*].

SHAMBHU [*disappears hurriedly up L off stage*]
I will be there. Remember thy bargain—three rupees and not one anna more.

SEETA. Eight annas more.

SHAMBHU. Five.

SEETA. Seven.

SHAMBHU. Six.

SEETA. A bargain!

SHAMBHU. I am delivered into thy hand, O thou Mother of a Goddess.

MAYA [*running footsteps of L-2, gaily*] Seeta—Seeta!

Crash of small mirror. Seeta startled, faces L-2, tense, alarmed.

MAYA. O—o—oh! [*Off stage—pause—backs on stage looking at floor off L in terror*] It is an omen. Seeta mai! An omen of evil!

SEETA. Nay—nay! Evil? No evil can befall an innocent such as thou. [*Tries to console Maya*].

MAYA. Seeta mai—I am so afraid! [*Clings to Seeta, but eyes off L-2*].

SEETA. Only the wicked need fear—and thou art not wicked.

MAYA [*eyes off L, gets idea, plants it front re robe, looks at herself, tenses—voices idea, sotto voce*]
I should not have put it on—not even to try it on. I have tried not to—oh so hard! And I have resisted his commands until to-day! Why did I yield to-day?

SEETA. Be sensible. Because of my entreaties, thy woman's curiosity, and love for—for beautiful things [*caressing and soothing her*].

MAYA. But the mirror—

SEETA. It was cracked before—I saw it—a tiny crack—away in one corner—thou canst not be held accountable if it was cracked before thou didst drop it.

MAYA. Thou art not saying that—merely to comfort me?

SEETA. Have I ever lied to thee before—why should I now?

MAYA [*dissembling*]. But to wear the robe of the Goddess—

SEETA. Robe of the Goddess? What Goddess? The robe was made for thee at the order of a man—as our most robes for women.

MAYA. But HE designed me to wear it as the Goddess.

SEETA. He designed—who is he? Men design many things for us women to do—and we do as we please—men thinking we do as they please.

Shambhu knocks off down L. Seeta looks down L. Remembers Shambhu, to down L-C.

MAYA. What—?

SEETA [*pausing L-C in almost childish delight*] A surprise for thee! [*To door L-1. Maya down C affected by Seeta's mood*]. Shambhu! Thou shalt see him!

MAYA. In this? [*Indicating robe fearfully*]. In the robe of the Goddess! Nay! Nay! ' [*Return of alarm. Towards Seeta*].

SEETA. Bah! ! Be not so foolish! Thou knowest Shambhu! A money-lender hath no eyes for man or woman. God or Goddess! Only for his interest money! To an anna he can divine what is in thy purse—but as to what thou wearest— [*unbolts door L-1*]. *

MAYA [*to Seeta quickly*] But—Father Ram Das? He hath ordered me to see no one—

SEETA [*facing Maya positively*] Except thou be robed as the Goddess! Well—So thou art robed! [*Exits down L leaving door open*].

MAYA. But—? [*After Seeta a step, pauses, debates the situation, glances at the robe in anxiety, loses fears as she falls victim to the robe's beauty; smiles*]. That is so, I am not disobeying him. [*Dainty little touches to robe, a child with a new wonderful doll, picks up mirror C, arranges her Sari very daintily*]. *

SEETA [*angrily off L-1*] Hai! What is all this?

Maya pauses in business, looks L-1 down a little, and listening off L.

SHAMBHU. It is all right—she is—

Maya a step L looking off.

SEETA [*positively off L-1 as though stopping someone*] Nay! Nay!

Maya smiles as she looks off L-1 from C.

SHAMBHU. I tell thee, Kripa is a good soul and—
SEETA [*interrupting*] And I tell thee, good souls have no need to see the Goddess! Only thieves and rascals like thyself!

SHAMBHU. Run!

Scuttling patter of sandals off L-1. Kripa enters down L breathlessly.

SEETA. Hai, come back here! [*Off L-1*].

KRIPA. Pranama! Pranama! Pranama! [*To her knees*].

MAYA. Kripa! Thou must not! [*Holds in horror*].

SHAMBHU [*enters down L, pauses as he sees Maya and Kripa, prostrates himself*] Pranama! Pranama!

Seeta enters down L angrily, pauses as she sees situation.

MAYA [*emotionally, helping Kripa to her feet*] Kripa! Thou must not! I am NO Goddess!! Shambhu get up!

SHAMBHU. As thou sayest! [*Rises*].

KRIPA. No—Goddess! [*Plaintively, at a loss. Shakes head in bewilderment, eyeing Maya*].

MAYA. Nay! Nay! Kripa—only Maya! Thy friend! Only Maya.

KRIPA [*smiles knowingly, recognises Maya, will do anything she commands, humbly*] As thou wilt, O Great Mother—O Maya, as thou wilt! Only that thou be my friend. I need a friend—ah, so badly—I am in such trouble—great trouble!

MAYA. What can I do? [*Sympathetically*].

KRIPA. Mend my roof. [*Wheedlingly*].

Maya at a loss: eyes Shambhu and Seeta for an explanation. Seeta snaps glance at Shambhu.

MAYA. Thy roof! Mend thy roof? I do not understand.

KRIPA. Four weeks ago, Father Abhiram, of blessed memory— [*disturbed at the recollection of the end of Act Two*] promised me a new hut just before he was struck down in all his iniquity—

Maya emotional pantomime, starts to speak. Seeta angrily towards Kripa, to speak, pauses as—

MAYA [*seeing Seeta's movement and mood, gestures her to be quiet*] Yes Kripa?

KRIPA. Well, Father Ram Das gave me the hut—agreeing with me that all promises made in thy holy name must be fulfilled as sacred obligations—er—er— [*At a loss*].

SHAMBHU [*prompting—his is the hand behind Kripa's actions*] Duly entered into.

KRIPA. —duly entered into—

Seeta glares understandingly at Shambhu. Shambhu eyes Seeta in mild innocence.

MAYA. But thou hast thy hut?

KRIPA. Aye! But not a good hut—it's roof—'tis leaky. [*Eyes Maya, hopeful smile*].

SEETA [*roughly*] There hath been no rain! How knowest thou 'tis leaky?

KRIPA. Shambhu hath shown me! With a



bamboo! It went right through.

SHAMBHU. 'Aye!

Seeta grins satisfaction, eyeing Shambhu in sarcastic appreciation of his hand in the matter.

KRIPA. I want it mended.

SHAMBHU. And I can have it mended—cheaply! Oh, very cheaply!

Maya hesitates, at a loss between pity and emotion.

KRIPA [*pressing her advantage*] Of course—I would prefer a NEW roof. [*Eyes Maya with hopeful smile, then disappointedly*] But, at least it must be mended— [*after thought*] TO-DAY!

SEETA. Bah! Hath the monsoon broken that thou worriest and dost weary us with thy leaky roof?

KRIPA. But it must rain soon—with the Goddess here, right amongst us. Knowing of our misery, seeing it with her own eyes—she knows she must send rain soon—and when it doth come, I shall be drenched and die—miserably—of the ague!

MAYA [*into agonised pantomime at people's misery—breaking voice*] Thou shalt not perish that way! I will speak to Father Ram Das—thy roof—shall be mended!

KRIPA. To-day?

MAYA. To-day.

KRIPA. Not—a new one? [*Wonderful smile, wheedlingly*].

MAYA. Oh! [*Not hearing Kripa's last word, turns R on her last line in agony, wringing hands, then up L and to up C during which—*]

SHAMBHU. Ssh! [*Angrily gripping Kripa by the arm: sotto voce*] Have I not told thee I have only sufficient straw to mend it? And—hast thou no gratitude? Give thanks to the Goddess and be off with thee!

Seeta instinctively up L-C, eyeing Maya and on the point of going to her to comfort her.

KRIPA. I thank thee, Great Goddess—even for thy promise only to mend it—to-day. I thank thee for thy sacred obligations duly—

Maya in agony up C not hearing Kripa.

SHAMBHU. Off with thee! [*Turns Kripa to face L-1 and walks her L*].

KRIPA. It must be to-day! Rain cometh! I feel it in my bone.

SHAMBHU. I will mend it to-day! Off with thee! [*Pauses at door L-1*] And Kripa, say to those who ask for me—that I shall not be long—that I am discussing matters of great importance with the Goddess— [*urges her L*].

KRIPA. It hath been a short talk for my four rupees.

Shambhu urges Kripa off L-1. Kripa exits down L grumbling. Seeta about to go to Maya, hears

Kripa's line, stops eyeing Shambhu. Maya to balcony up C. Shambhu turns up stage, eyes Seeta.

SEETA. SO!

SHAMBHU. So!

SEETA. Four rupees.

SHAMBHU. I am a man of business.

SEETA. Thou makest a profit even in seeing a Goddess.

SHAMBHU. Aye! And in so doing—do but confirm the holy Shastras.

MAYA [*turning down C emotionally. Utter oblivion to those present, outburst of soul, carrying over words from her last spoken line, not starting a new scene*] Still no rain! No food! [*Sees Shambhu, comes to him impulsively*] Shambhu! Hath no word come from those Father Ram Das sent forth for food?

SHAMBHU [*shakes head*] They must travel far. No one can tell how far.' All in the province suffer equally with us.

MAYA. And the crops—still no sign of rain!

SHAMBHU. None—save in Kripa's bones.

MAYA. Two months now since the monsoon hath been delayed!

SHAMBHU. Aye— [*Coming to his point*] And in that I feel that I may have been somewhat to blame, as well as thou. Thou should'st not have listened to my prayer for no rain—but as thou didst so—I seek thee—to—er—withdraw my OLD prayer, and substitute my NEW one.

MAYA. Thou—seekest me—to pray—to ME?

SHAMBHU. Aye—it can do no harm—no special reason not to—

MAYA. Oh! Thou must not! Thou shalt not! Shambhu, I am no Goddess! NO Goddess! Only Maya—the beggar-girl— [*breaks down; hysterically*].

Seeta quickly to Maya, all love and tenderness—ad lib, soothing and caressing her.

SHAMBHU [*visibly affected by Maya's words, yet playing safe—Heart against Brain*] I know naught of Goddesses and less of women—happily I am still a bachelor. But IF the Great Goddess doth indeed incarnate herself from time to time—assuming the garb of a beggar-girl; thou mayst be the mortal abode she hath selected. It is a fair abode: umn—I am not a Goddess—but I would not seek further. I THINK—of course, I THINK thou art but MAYA, but—

MAYA. BLESS THEE! Bless thee! For these words. Shambhu! [*Emotionally*].

SHAMBHU. But—mortal thought is usually wrong. Thou mayest in truth be the incarnation of the Goddess—

MAYA. Nay! Nay!

SHAMBHU. If there BE a Goddess—

MAYA. She doth not incarnate herself in me! I know!

SHAMBHU. I agree with thee, but WE may be mistaken. It is on the chance that we ARE, that I

come to thee, I feel it but part of wisdom to allow no oversight in my part to lessen my income. So, I would have thee know, Goddess or no Goddess, that NOW, like all others, I pray nightly for rain. Foolishly I bought the grain given to the people from the temple, and planted it—relying—relying upon immediate rain because the Goddess was amongst us. And I may say that if rain comes in time to save my seed—of all my harvests if bounteous, I will give to whomsoever thou shalt designate—a tenth— [*pauses, eyeing her keenly*] or a ninth—or a portion— [*pauses, eyeing her keenly*] to be mutually agreed upon.

SEETA. GO!

SHAMBHU. That is all. As I have pledged thee all the morning, I will not waste thy time. Pranama, O Great Goddess—IF thou art one.

MAYA. Thou knowest I am not!

SHAMBHU. Thou art garbed as one.

MAYA. Garb doth not make a Goddess!

SHAMBHU. Nay—but it helps.

MAYA. If only it did! If only I were the Goddess!

SHAMBHU. Thou mayest be—thou canst not know thou art not.

MAYA. But I DO know! The people are starving. If I were the Goddess would I do nothing to help them? They starve, and I am powerless to save them! [*Breaks off hopelessly*].

SHAMBHU. These things are indeed a puzzle—none seems to know anything at all about anything—so, until we DO know, we can only remain in doubt, and take precautions.

MAYA [*low voice, repeating thought to herself as she goes about the stage*] Oh! If only I were the Goddess! If only I were— [*pauses in her hopeless pacing, gets thought, eyes up C to balcony—looks out for rain signs, shakes head, returns to divan, sinks dejectedly upon cushions, sobbing*] O Seeta mai, I feel so sad—!

SEETA. Why shouldst thou, my child?

MAYA. I know not why—but I fear some grievous harm is going to befall me—me or—or—Him!

SEETA. Did I not tell thee a moment ago that no harm can befall such an innocent as thou. [*Gets an idea*] Sonia!

SONIA. Didst thou call me? [*Enters*].

SEETA. Aye. Where art thou going?

SONIA. To the temple. To dance to the Goddess.

SEETA. The Goddess is here. Canst thou see?

SONIA. Aye! She is indeed a Goddess.

SEETA. She is troubled—worried exceedingly—I know not why? Wilt thou not do something to amuse her?

SONIA. Dance?

SEETA. Why not? And I'll sing.



— "Sayesr Thou - - - -"

Throughout this scene Maya is lost in thought. Seeta begins the song, Sonia begins the dance; Maya startled—raises head—smiles sadly, watches the dance. Ram Das at the end of second verse enters moodily and testily down R, pauses well on as he sees Sonia dance—changes to surprise, then delight as he sees Maya. Sonia at his entrance abruptly stops the dance. Naren follows Ram Das.

NAREN. Ram Das, •I tell thee that the girl—
[pauses R-C on seeing Maya].

Maya straight up C to balcony. Prema and Robin follow Ram Das on and hold down R, eyeing Maya.

NAREN. SO—it seems Ram Das hath been deceiving us.

MAYA. He hath not.

NAREN. He told us thou still refusest to don the robe of the Goddess.

MAYA. To wear it as the Goddess—to appear to the people in it as the Goddess—I STILL refuse. I but put it on—to TRY it on..

SEETA. Aye. For me.

NAREN. Ram Das—we have supported thee faithfully in thy mission; there is none more fit than thou to be our leader. But thou must not lose sight of all else in the blind pursuit of the ideal—and that ideal must be brought into being through material means. [Lays down the law] Maya hath not appeared before the people in the guise of the Great

Mother. Thy love hath made thee, entreat her to do so—now thou must COMMAND—the girl must appear to the people to-day!

Maya draws herself up defiantly. Ram Das eyes Maya, half starts towards her, pauses. Sonia xs to Seeta and whispers to her.

NAREN. If only from yonder balcony! [*Indicates balcony up C. Holds a moment, gestures to Prema and Robin to exit*].

Prema, Robin and Naren exit down R. Seeta and Sonia sense the coming scene, quietly exit up L with sympathy for Maya. Ram Das pauses, hard front, soul struggle.

MAYA [*hard, quietly, inflexibly, after pause*] I will not—and 'tis wrong of thee to ask it.

RAM DAS. Thou art wrong in thy wilful persistence—in refusing my entreaties. Maya, the men I have sent with temple jewels to buy food—they must return soon—I must have time. By thy appearance the people will know the Goddess is still among them—

MAYA. Nay! Nay! I'did thee injustice. Thou hast shown me the hollowness and mockery of individuals—but NOT of my FAITH. Thy ideal is great, but in pursuit of it, thou hast lost sight of it. Thou canst not tear down sham, hypocrisy and fraud by employing them. Bad means CANNOT lead to a good END.

RAM DAS. Maya—

MAYA. Nay! Nay!

RAM DAS. Fire must be fought with fire.

MAYA. Thou hast done so—the fires have united and, with what result? Thou art become afraid. and in terror lendest thyself to that which thou hast been fighting against.

RAM DAS. Aye—afraid! But not for myself,—lest I fail—Bhakat become High Priest, and all that I fight against become victorious over truth.

MAYA. What truth? Thou hast not taught the people truth!

RAM DAS. Because they were not ready to accept it! I thought they were, but they were not.

MAYA. More ready to receive than thou to give! Thou hast not given it to them more than thou hast given it to me!

RAM DAS. Maya!

MAYA. I am of the people—I know we will never be satisfied with half truths!

RAM DAS. Maya! Thinkest thou I have played the hypocrite with thee? Nay! Nay!

MAYA. Yea! Either that—either that, or perhaps thou hast not seen the truth at all—only its dim reflection, distorted, as in a mirror. And now, thou as well as the people find it but illusion!

RAM DAS. Nay! Not that! I have done with illusions.

MAYA. Thou canst never be done with it. All is illusion.

RAM DAS. Knowledge is the be-all, end-all—everything!

MAYA. Knowledge as thou thinkest of it, indeed means the end of all—Belief, Legend, Faith, Fairy-tale. Without them our souls would be but cinders—burnt-offerings on the altar of thy AWFUL knowledge. All is illusion and must remain so.

RAM DAS. What then of God?

MAYA. Perhaps the greatest illusion of all—but—the most beautiful and necessary of all! Man-kind hath no sustained interest in simple things, ever delights in mysteries. God surely knoweth His own creation—the mystery of God once known—perchance all force for good in the idea might be destroyed.

RAM DAS. Keep to thy illusions then—I'll have none of them! Maya, thou hast said that all thy former love for me hath returned!

MAYA. Indeed it hath. I think I never loved thee as I do now.

RAM DAS. Then Maya—by the love thou sayest hath returned for me—by thy love for me, Maya, let the people, thy friends, thy neighbours—let them see their Goddess! They demand her!

MAYA. And thou wouldst give them me? Nay! Nay! And—if thou lovest me thou wilt not ask it.

RAM DAS. 'Tis BECAUSE I love thee, that I ask thee! If I did not love thee, I would go forth to the people now, promise them the appearance of their Goddess yonder—and command thy—obedience.

MAYA. O—o—oh! Thou couldst not do such a thing!

RAM DAS. It may become necessary. Maya—wilt thou desert me in my hour of need?

MAYA. Perchance in that hour I may save thee.

RAM DAS. That hour is now—Maya!

JAICHAND [*enters hurriedly down R*] Hasten! Hasten to the market-place. The people cry out against thee. Bhakat leads them—denounces THEE as false priest [*to Ram Das*]*—THEE as a false Goddess* [*to Maya*].

RAM DAS. I feared this. [*At a momentary loss, starts L*].

JAICHAND. Nay—through the temple shrine—'tis shorter [*indicating down R*].

Ram Das exits down R hurriedly. Jaichand exits after him. Maya holds in tense fear—a half pleading movement as Ram Das exits, pauses mournfully. Seeta enters fearfully.

MAYA. Without a word of farewell,—he does not love me—does not even think of me.

SEETA. Aye—have I not told thee so—every day since he falsely proclaimed thee Goddess? Oh, put thy love for him out of thy heart. Thou knowest how he would employ thee, aye, and perchance sacrifice thee to further his own selfish designs.

MAYA. Indeed it seemeth so—but— [*breaks off—looks at chest, then at robe*].

SEETA. What—?

MAYA. The feeling came to me—that, wearing the robe of the Goddess—means—death. How—how foolish of me! I suppose it was because Father Naren was here but a moment ago, demanding that I appear—and then—just now—when HE—threatened?

Naren enters in alarm followed by Prema and Robin.

MAYA. Why—why art thou come here again?

NAREN. To add our command to what hath been but a lover's pleading.

MAYA. Thinkest thou I will obey thy commands when I have refused his request?

NAREN. The people have risen—are rushing hither—from the market-place—thou must appear yonder as the Goddess.

MAYA. Nay! 'Twere sacrilege.

PREMA. Why sacrilege now—not before?

MAYA. Before? Thou meanest the night Father 'Abhiram died? Thou knowest well I did not realise the people were acclaiming me. When I DID realise—I was being hurried away here.

NAREN. Thou must appear as the Goddess.

MAYA. I will not pretend to be the Great Mother.

NAREN. There is naught of pretence on thy part. Thou needest say naught.

MAYA. Are these robes not pretence?

NAREN. Thou canst not be held responsible if others in illusion mistake thee for what thou art not.

MAYA. Oh!—Thou art accounted a good man, Father Naren,—yet sayest that.

NAREN. I am working for a great cause. And as such I have a duty I must place above—conscience.

MAYA. Is not conscience the voice of God?

NAREN. Thou must not seek to entangle me in the mesh of thy woman's wit. Maya, the people cry out for thee—they demand thy appearance.

MAYA. Cry out for me, or for the Goddess?

PREMA. APPEAR willingly—or thou shalt be made to do so.

MAYA. Thou wouldst sacrifice me as Father Abhiram did his lamb?

NAREN. If thou wouldst save the people, thou wilt appear to them as the Goddess.

MAYA. If I thought I could save the people, I would appear, pretend to be the Great Goddess, lend myself to any deceit thy brain could devise, commit any sacrilege—

NAREN. There is no question of sacrilege. WE will so work upon the people's fears and hopes, that, they will remain quiet. Thus alone canst thou SAVE us—from the people's wrath—and in saving us thou dost save them.

MAYA. Now I fear thou art seeking to entangle me in the mesh of thy MAN'S wisdom. How can saving you, save them from starvation?

PREMA. Without their leaders to guide them—their immortal souls—

MAYA. What of their MORTAL LIVES?

PREMA. Their misery here is but the outcome of their former bad living—hath naught to do with us. That is their concern.

MAYA. Then THY present misery and fear must be the outcome of THY sinful living in the past—and is but THY concern.

NAREN. Nay—nay! What gains it ever to argue with a woman. She hath promised to save the people—

MAYA. I will do anything—ANYTHING—that will save the people. Their bodies, their lives! But to do this thing that THOU demandest of me—NAY! I tell thee, if this false Goddess thou hast proclaimed appear yonder and succour NOT the people with food and rain—they may turn infidel—and then what of their immortal souls that thou art so concerned for? Nay! Nay! I will have naught to do with it. Fearing only for your power, you would practise iniquity upon iniquity in the vain hope of putting off the hour of reckoning, the hour of your un-masking, the hour when the people will know you for—what you are—false priests gabbling sacriligious emptiness in the name of One you know not, nor ever will know!

PREMA. Hast thou thought what will happen to thee if thou dost not appear as the Goddess?

MAYA. Nay! And will not think of it. Thou canst not frighten me to thy will. Thou canst not play upon my fears for myself.

NAREN. And what of thy fears for thy lover? In that hour of our un-masking—hast thought of what will happen to him?

MAYA. To him? [*Eyes tensely, fear growing*].

NAREN. He first proclaimed thee Goddess! His was the first deceit. He—he deceived even us.

MAYA. Aye.

NAREN. And—he is now promising the people • thou wilt appear—proclaiming it to all the villagers.

MAYA. He—is proclaiming—that?

NAREN. All agreed it was necessary.

MAYA. Oh! [*Pauses, holds*].

Naren eyes Maya keenly. gestures the priests off imperatively. Priests exit down R.

MAYA. He would never have promised I would appear—except—in utter need. I will do thy will. But if thou art lying to me—I warn thee I will proclaim thy lies to the people.

NAREN. His fate is certain if thou dost not appear and HIS fate will be THINE.

SEETA. What dost thou mean by that?

NAREN. Thinkest thou the false Goddess will be more immune from the people's wrath than the one who hath proclaimed her?

SEETA. But he is guilty—she is innocent.

NAREN. WE know that—but do the people know? Will a mob stop to reason, enquire, listen to thee or to me?—and 'tis a mob that comes from the market-place—a mob led by Bhakat who hates both

All blinds are down and heaven sleeps—so every
 path of glory ends
High as the scaled steeps—the downward path so
 low descends.

Shiva ! Shiva ! Shiva ! is Great !

As the voice dies away Jaichand's head appears behind the balcony.

JAICHAND. Maya! Maya! Quick—I'll halt thee over the balcony. [*Comes over rail*].

MAYA [*starts*] Jaichand?

JAICHAND. Run through the courtyard—climb the wall where 'tis broken—thou mayest escape them yet. [*Tries to take her*].

MAYA. Nay! Nay! Jaichand! 'Tis true what the priests have just told me? The people have risen—against HIM?

JAICHAND. Aye! Aye! Come!

MAYA. Oh! But he is still safe then?

JAICHAND. Aye! Aye! But waste not time in talk, come!

MAYA. Nay! My place is here! [*Draws back shaking head*].

JAICHAND. Stay here?

MAYA. Thou dost not understand, I appear there.
[pointing to balcony up C]. as the Goddess, thee
save him.

JAICHAND. Thou canst not save him by remaining—

MAYA. Then thinkest thou I will desert him in his hour of need? Nay! [*Holds fiercely, imperiously to door R*].

JAICHAND [*playing high tension and never relaxing in his attempt to get Maya off up C till her line above. Pauses, eyes her, sees her inflexibility, then quietly, gently, admiringly: entirely different key*] Thou art very foolish to stay, when thou might'st flee and live! Stand thou by the door—HE comes through the shrine if at all—

MAYA. He IS—still safe then?

JAICHAND. Would I lie about such a thing? [*Indicates door down R*]. If any come but HE—bolt it—quick. [*To down L. Then to C, looks at Maya takes bag from waist, opens it and sorts its contents, looking for definite thing, slowly towards Maya*].

MAYA. Thou must not stay! [*Quietly but tensely*].

JAICHAND. I must not go.

MAYA. But Jaichand—!

JAICHAND [*very casually, intent on bag, finds the object he searches for, xs to Maya*]. Take it before the people—come to thee.

Maya tenses, eyes Jaichand, then packet, smiles in appreciation of his thoughtfulness, gently shakes head.

JAICHAND. Thou needest not fear to take it—we dacoits know it well—ever keep it at hand—in case of need—just drowsiness—then sleep—I know I am outcast, but thou canst take it from me—there is no caste in death.

MAYA. And thou?

JAICHAND. Nay! With the doors bolted none come save by the courtyard. I stay there. [*Simply ca-*

sually, but fingers mechanically feeling his dagger and short sword—suddenly tenses—steps past Maya to door down Rl. Be off with thee.

NAREN [*enters with breathless line*] I must speak with Maya.

JAICHAND. Nay! If thou must speak—speak from where thou art.

NAREN. Be ready—at any moment, now. Bhakat leads the people to the courtyard. But WE will be there before them. When thou dost hear me appeal to thee in prayer,—appear. Be not afraid.

MAYA. I will appear.

NAREN. Seeing thee in the robe and crown and jewels of the Goddess—none will doubt—be not afraid.

MAYA. Enough! All I can do to save him I will do—But only to save him.

NAREN. Remember—when thou dost hear me call for thee.

JAICHAND. What? Still here?

Jaichand advances on Naren with dagger. Naren exits hurriedly down R. Jaichand holds peering suspiciously off down R.

MAYA [*fingers packet of poison*] Jaichand?—

JAICHAND. Aye?

MAYA. All?

JAICHAND. Aye.

MAYA. How long?

JAICHAND. Five minutes at most.

Crowd off stage. Loud murmur gradually rising

to a crescendo. Priests' low monotonous murmur off R as they enter courtyard.

JAICHAND. They come! They come! Guard thou the door. [*Indicates door down R*].

Maya to door down R, alternately looking off R and up C. Jaichand goes to C and cautiously holds concealed behind hangings to niche, peering off down and up L, draws back a bit. Crowd off L and nearing. At first their cries are heard, then a louder voice is heard, then definite shouts and cries off. Priests off up R and C start droning chant that at first is almost drowned in cries of mob, then becomes clearer, and finally naught but chant is heard. Crowd up C, but silent on hearing chant. Maya in breath—simply, eyeing audience but with mind on the Infinite, no attempt at rhetoric.

BHAKAT [*off up C*] Come now! Show thyself, thou false priest! Show thyself—and show us thy false Goddess as well.

Jaichand peering cautiously up balcony, but draws back on Bhakat's line. Maya holds R-C facing up C. Jaichand loosens dagger.

SEETA [*off up C*] She is not false; she IS the Goddess! [*Frenziedly*]. I have seen her! Bhakat lies! He has plotted against the Goddess! And in her wrath the Goddess will not send food or rain until Bhakat is cast out—a sacrifice to— [*groans as though struck down*].

Jaichand leans forward looking down.

BHAKAT. Take her away.

MAYA. Jaichand?

JAICHAND. She is not harmed—only—

NAREN [*off up C, starts to speak*] My children!

MAYA. Jaichand!

JAICHAND [*listening to Naren*] Ssh! Ssh!

MAYA. Guard THOU the door.

Jaichand backs cautiously to door R. Maya xs to down C to the chest.

NAREN. My children! Seeta hath told the truth and Bhakat lies.

BHAKAT. I do not lie!

NAREN. You shall see the Goddess! The plotting against her and her chosen disciples have been the cause of her wrath against you—but your prayers are heard. In her divine compassion the Great Mother at last hath consented to appear—

CROWD. Jai! Jai!

MAYA. O Great Mother, forgive! It is to save HIM—I love him so. [*Puts on crown, gathers herself for effort and turns slowly up C*].

JAICHAND. Maya— [*sotto voce appeal: holds at a loss*].

Crowd off up C in absolute silence as Naren finishes. A long pause, then a low impatient murmur rises that swells into angry shouts, and instantly stops as they see Maya. Maya at balcony, holds—then slowly looks down into courtyard.

BHAKAT. That is no Goddess! 'Tis only Maya the—

NAREN [*commandingly as Bhakṛat says "tis"*]
Silence, thou impious—

CROWD. Silence! Silence!

MAYA. O my people—even as I would be beloved by you—so is your High Priest, Ram Das—beloved by me. Believe in him, and he shall lead you to the truth. Rain and food shall come to succour you. I—the Goddess—promise it, O my people. [*Pauses, then back to stage*].

NAREN. Pranama to the Goddess—Pranama—who hath promised to send you food and rain.

CROWD. Pranama! Pranama!

MAYA. Forgive! Forgive! And in thy infinite understanding, understand! In thy infinite justice accept my life in atonement for my sacrilege! I give it gladly—though knowing well that by my act I renounce HIM—for incarnations to come. [*Takes poison without looking at it—makes nothing of it*]. Forgive? [*Holds a moment as though waiting for an answer from deity, pauses, looks about*]. It seems darker than when— [*holds a moment, thinks poison is working*] Jaichand—

JAICHAND. Aye—it is darker.

MAYA. Jaichand—he WILL come here—before—before—? [*Yearningly and trustingly as a child, breaks off, feels the coming of Ram Das, eyes down R and towards it radiant with love*] O-o-oh!

RAM DAS [*enters down R hurriedly, pauses as he sees Jaichand, glances wildly about the stage, about to speak to Jaichand, sees Maya*] Maya!

Crowd off up C. Angry murmurings to a tumult during the succeeding scene.

MAYA. Thou art come back to me! Come back to me! [Going to Ram Das, devouring him with her last glances and fondling him for the last time in her mind].

RAM DAS. Aye! Aye! My love! [Brokenly, taking her in his arms, gripping her tightly].

• *Jaichand up C alertly listening to mob—also watching the scene on stage.*

RAM DAS. Every way was barred to me—till a moment ago, when ALL rushed to the courtyard—[transition—confession]. I have failed—FAILED! Oh, so miserably, my love! Thou hast been right—in everything! Too late to retrieve my position! All power gone! I SEE the truth as thou hast seen it—and not its dim reflection distorted which I thought the truth!

MAYA. I am glad—so glad.

RAM DAS. Now—now all I have is—thee! THEE! Thou at least art not illusion!

MAYA. Aye—thou wilt find it so.

RAM DAS. Aye! BE it so, then! If thou sayest—I believe! Oh, my beloved—I think I am content to have failed—I think I never realised ALL my love for thee till now.

MAYA. Thou dost love me really?

RAM DAS. LOVE thee! [Grips her in his arms] Jaichand!

Jaichand comes down R-C.

RAM DAS. Quick! The way is clear! Through the shrine! [*Indicates door down R, taking Maya R a bit*] Come! Come, my love. [*Impatient love—reproachfully*].

Maya weak, shakes head sadly, smiles. Jaichand eyes Maya emotionally—half starts to her, pauses.

MAYA. Nay! Nay! Go thou with Jaichand—while there is time. I cannot go—the Great Goddess hath listened to my prayer—forgiven my sacrilege—hath opened the way for thy safety! I cannot go with thee—THOU must go on alone—my beloved.

RAM DAS. Maya!

Ram Das alarmed: at a loss.

MAYA. I am SO glad thou lovest me. [*Sinks in his arms*].

RAM DAS. Maya! Maya! [*Holds her to himself, at a loss, alarmed*]. Jaichand?

JAICHAND. To save THY LIFE she hath spoken to the people as the Goddess—and—in atonement—hath destroyed herself.

RAM DAS. Destroyed? [*Holds dazedly eyeing Jaichand, his lips only forming the words. Eyes Maya in intense agony*].

MAYA. Food must come soon—and rain—[*seriously*].

Much darker off. Ram Das—dry sob—takes Maya to C, lowers her to cushions—supports her in arms, eyes her devouringly.

MAYA. There is something I promised—Oh yes—
[*smiles at Rám Das*] I almost forgot—[*pauses seriously*] Kripa—Shambhu must mend her roof—
'tis leaky—the bamboo goes right through—and if rain comes—why doesn't it rain, my beloved? Why?

Crowd cries off up C—low to loud. Priests stop chant. Jaichand goes up C to balcony, watches off. Rám Das shakes head in agony, holding Maya.

*MAYA. And they must have food! They MUST!

CROWD. Food!—Food!—It hath come! Jai! Jai!
[*Pandemonium of delight*].

Jaichand to balcony, looks over to L. Rám Das unheeding of mob.

MAYA [*eyeing C with effort, raises herself*] What is it? [*Tense fear, clutching Rám Das*] The people rise against thee! Thou must go! Thou must go! Jaichand! [*Pushing him from her*].

RAM DAS. Nay! Nay! [*Holding her tightly—soothing her*].

MAYA. Nay? [*Shakes head eyeing him, believing*].

JAICHAND. Food! It HATH come! Food! The men are returned!

Crowd ad lib, frenzy of delight.

RAM DAS. They cry out for thee! Food—, 'tis come—food!—The people are saved! [*Gently, impressing thought*].

MAYA. Food? [*Simply, smiles*].

Drops of rain fall stage off up C.

MAYA. They will not harm thee now.

Ram Das takes her in arms, holds her tightly : tears. Stage darker.

MAYA. Hold me closer. If—if only we could meet again soon ! Soon, my beloved !

Jaichand down R-C, awed.

RAM DAS. Maya ! Maya ! [*Heedless of all else—holds, intense agony*].

MAYA. Thou dost love me ?—Food—hath come ?

RAM DAS. Aye.

MAYA. And rain—?

JAICHAND. RAIN ! The monsoon hath broken ! Rain !

MAYA. It's raining too.—O—o—oh !—I am so—so glad—my beloved. [*Smiles at Ram Das, dies*].

Ram Das sobs.

JAICHAND [*coming down C to Ram Das*] The people cry out for their Goddess who hath saved them !

RAM DAS. They SHALL see their Goddess—MY LIVING GODDESS ! [*As if in a trance*].

CURTAIN.

FINIS.

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